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OR,

Deadwood Dick Junior's Racket at Claim No. 10.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BAD SPOT.

"AIRE ye goin' to stop off at Alta, stranger?" queried Jehu Josh, who drove the old iron-clad stage, that plied over one of Arizona's rugged mountain routes, not far from the California border, "fer ef you aire, I want ter tell ye thet et aire a purty fly camp, an' a feller don't want"

"HELLO! THERE!" SHE SALUTED, AS SHE FLASHED THE LIGHT OF HER LANTERN UPON DEADWOOD DICK JUNIOR. "SO YOU'RE HERE, ARE YOU, MISTER PHILO FLY OF PHENIX?"

go to puttin' on no Eastern lugs, or he's liable ter suddenly fergit where he left himself, ther last time he held a grip onto his memory!"

The remark was addressed to one of two passengers, who shared the elevated seat with the driver, as the stage tore away down a narrow gulch, drawn by a spirited quartette of strong-limbed horses.

The party to whom the driver had spoken, was perhaps twenty-six years of age, possessed of a stalwart, graceful figure, and a handsome face. His complexion and hair and curling mustache belonged to the blonde type, and his eyes were dark blue in color, and very bright and expressive.

He was well-dressed, and plainly not long from the East—a fact that the keen-eyed Jehu had no difficulty in determining.

Josh's other passenger on the seat was a younger man by several years, with a round, pleasing boyish face, dark-brown eyes and hair, and the free and easy mannerisms that proclaimed him to be a son of the West, as did his dashing style of dress, a noticeable part of which were the top-boots and jaunty sombrero he wore.

Although he did not look as if out of his teens in age, he was muscularly built, and evidently possessed a full man's store of strength and activity.

The man to whom the driver's words were addressed did not immediately answer, for he had, seemingly, been in a deep reverie for several minutes before—a reverie that clouded his handsome face with an expression of trouble and regret.

Finally, however, he turned his gaze toward Jehu Josh, half angrily:

"No, I am not going to stop at Alta!" he answered, "and if I were, I should not need or heed your advice, for I stand in fear of no man," a retort that drew from the driver a whistle of astonishment, while the other passenger was not a little surprised. For in truth, the Easterner did not look like a combative or resentful man.

"Waal, ye needn't be so sassy about et!" Josh hastened to assure, "fer I only jest offered et to you as a bit o' friendly advice."

"Excuse me, old man—excuse me. Perhaps I did speak, too sharply, but when my mind is harassed by its troubles, I sometimes forget to be gentlemanly. No, I shall not stop at Alta, but this side of there."

"What! not at Claim 10?"

"Exactly."

Jehu Josh gave his passenger a keenly inquiring glance.

"Waal, ye'r a queer 'un, I'll swow!" he allowed, as he gave an extra crack to his long-lashed whip. "Guess you don't know what ye'r talkin' 'bout, stranger!"

"On the contrary, that is just what I do!" was the terse assurance.

"And ye'r goin' to Claim 10?"

"I am, for a certainty!"

"Ever been there, before?"

"Never was there."

Josh glanced at the other passenger, with a peculiar smile, but did not resume his queries for several minutes, the stage in the mean time bowling along at full speed, creaking and careening as it rushed along the uneven trail.

Finally, Josh went on:

"Waal, mebbe you know yer biz, stranger, but ef I war a tenderfoot I'd wanter be stoppin' at some healthier place than Claim 10, I kin tell ye. Course 'tain't none o' my mutton, though!"

"What's the matter with Claim 10?" asked the younger passenger.

"Thar's a good deal the matter!" Josh replied with a significant shake of his head, "but of course it isn't fer me to say just what!"

"And why not?"

"Waal, ye see, I've driv' ther stage over this route fer two year, now, 'thout gittin' my head blown off, and that's more'n any other man kin say, ef I do say et. There's Jack Penrose, Lew Rogers, Hi Sands an' Jube Jackson, who every one on 'em passed in their checks, while handl' n' these ribbons, but I've pulled thru' 'cause I never blow very much 'bout ther goin's on at ther Claim. In fact, I never try ter know anything about 'em, but I can't 'scape knowin' et's a bad old camper fer a stranger to anchor in, an' don't yer fergit et. That's why I told you; I felt it the right thing to do. But, my heart wouldn't be worth a cent a pound for liver-worst if it was known I had told ye!"

"Humph! What is there so peculiarly dangerous about Claim 10?" the blonde passenger demanded, seeming to gather increasing interest in the matter. "Is it a thieves' nest, or what?"

Jehu Josh shrugged his shoulders with another peculiar glance at the younger passenger.

"Waal, I don't opine that the folks who live there aire any too honest," was his answer, "but that ain't all. Sometimes folks stops off at the place an' puts up at Black Mag's, an' that's the last that's ever heerd from 'em!"

"What is Black Mag's?"

"That is the only hotel in the place, or the only place where there's any 'commodations of enny sort, 'cept ye lay out o' doors on ther *terra-firma*, which ain't werry nice this weather."

"Can't a traveler get 'commodations at any of the cabins?"

"No. Them as lives in what few cabins there are, hev been warned not to give food or shelter, under penalty of death, an' you kin bet they're all keeful to save ther own bacon. Thar ain't more'n a score o' livin' cabins, all told, an' they're chock filled up w' ther respectable element of the camp. T'others, they all hang out at Black Mag's."

"She must have a large place."

"You'll think so when you see it. It's a regular barn of a place, an' I've hearn tell as how et has more crooks, peccoliarities, an' sech, then ye kin shake a stick at."

"Who puts this extraordinary ban upon the residents of the town?"

"Red Ruthven, the road-agent. He's a holy terror among the people around and about Claim 10, and ef he puts up a notis, makin' an order, either they've got to do as it directs, or they'll be found dead w' ther boots on."

"A very remarkable state of affairs, I should say," the blonde declared. "Who owns this Claim 10?"

"Buck Brennan. He's the richest man around these parts, except old Jim Shook, of Alta."

This information did not seem to particularly interest either passenger, and the conversation ceased.

On rattled the coach, over a route that grew rougher and rougher, causing the "old hearse" to pitch from side to side, until with difficulty the passengers could keep their seats.

Just before sunset the stage halted for a few minutes at a little town called Henryville, and here what passengers had ridden inside the coach got out.

"I guess we might as well take their places," the blonde man said to the younger passenger, and accordingly they left Jehu to the company of his horses and entered the coach, which, after a short delay, resumed its journey.

"What do you think of the driver's story about this Claim 10?" the blonde man asked, as he sat facing his younger companion.

"Not a very good reference, I should say!" was the reply. "I've heard before that it was a hard hole."

"Well, maybe it is, but it doesn't matter; I am going there, just the same."

"Ditto, here; that's my drop-off."

"Well, that's news. What takes *you* there?"

"Oh! a matter of business."

"What business?"

"I do not choose to make it known, sir—not at present, anyhow."

A sudden glare of suspicion entered the blonde man's eyes, and he seized the younger man's wrist in a vise-like grasp.

"If I thought you were sent to dog me, I'd kill you where you sit!" he hissed, seemingly inspired with intense rage.

"You needn't put yourself to such trouble!" the other replied, apparently not much alarmed. "I have not been set to dog you, nor do I know or care who or what you are."

The blonde released his grip, still eying his companion doubtfully.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Well, sir, I am at present sailing my ship under the name of Philo Fly, of Phenix—Phil Fly, for short. I may have another name, or a half a dozen of 'em, but Philo or Phil will answer all demands for the present. And now, suppose you tell us *your* handle."

"My name is Bartley Brewster, to you. I, too, may have had another name, but it is dead now. I rather like your style, friend Philo, and as we are both going to this bad camp, I propose we mate together for mutual protection."

"I'm agreeable!" Phil returned. "I've no doubt but what we shall need our wits about us to keep out of trouble, and may have to fight for our lives. If it does come to that, I carry a couple of talkers, and know pretty well how to handle them, I fancy."

"Which is a good thing. I, too, am armed, and not afraid to fight, if it is necessary. I suppose, according to the driver, we shall have to

accept of accommodations at Black Mag's Hotel or else sleep out doors?"

"I don't know, yet. We may get no chance to sleep at all. One thing, I'd advise you to take that diamond pin out of your scarf. Such costly trinkets as them ain't safe to wear into such a place as Camp 10!"

Brewster followed the advice, and the stage rolled on through the gathering gloom of the night.

As Brewster appeared to become absorbed in his own thoughts, the conversation, of course, stopped.

All at once, however, a little cry of surprise burst from Phil Fly's lips, as he saw a man's face, for an instant, appear at the window in the door of the coach,—a brutal-looking, be-whiskered face, of the most villainous type, peeping out from under the broad rim of a slouch sombrero.

It was quickly withdrawn, however, and the next instant there was a flash, and the sharp report of a revolver.

Then, a groan of pain escaped Bartley Brewster, and he cried:

"My God! I have been shot!"

CHAPTER II.

"OPEN THIS HYER DOOR!"

YES, the blonde passenger was shot!

There could be no doubt of that, for he sunk backward upon his seat, and appeared to either faint or expire.

Phil Fly could not really tell which, for the gloom within the stage-coach was so dense.

"Hello! there! stop the coach," Philo yelled to the driver. "Mr. Brewster has been shot!"

But no attention was paid to the appeal, and the clumsy vehicle rattled on, as though nothing had happened.

Again, Philo shouted, at the top of his voice, but to no use; the stage did not slacken in the least, and was going at a speed that made it dangerous to attempt to get out of it.

"Confound the driver! Either he's deaf or this is a put-up job!" the boy muttered, in vexation. "I wonder if my friend is badly wounded?"

He seized the stricken man by the shoulder.

"Hey, Brewster, are ye hurt bad?" he asked.

"Where did the bullet ketch you?"

The only answer was a faint groan.

As well as he could Philo made an examination, to ascertain where the shot had taken effect. He found the garments over Brewster's left breast saturated with what he had a good reason to suppose was blood.

In the darkness, however, he had no means of offering the suffering man any relief, and was wondering what to do when the stage rounded an abrupt curve and rolled down into a little mining-camp, whose twinkling lights Philo could see from the window.

"Claim 10!" roared Jehu Josh, from his box, as the vehicle came to a halt. "All passenjars out fer Claim 10!"

Philo Fly of Phenix at once opened the door and clambered out of the coach, at the same time darting a quick glance to ascertain if possible what were his immediate surroundings.

The coach had halted in front of a large two-story-and-attic frame building, sided up with rough, unplanned boards, and battened with strips—a barn-like edifice, which, owing to its unusual size, was a novelty to find in a little camp like Claim 10, which boasted of a permanent population of about two hundred souls.

An unroofed piazza extended along the front of this structure, and over the principal entrance door, was a sign-board, bearing the inscription:

"ROARING BULL HOTEL,

"BLACK MAG, Prop'r."

Several men were lounging upon this piazza, as Philo Fly got out of the stage—big, ruffianly-looking fellows, whose faces reflected their time-hardened natures. They regarded Philo with scrutinizing glances.

"Toughs, of the first water!" Phil thought, "and as Brewster is badly hurt, I see no other way than what we shall have to take up with the accommodations of this den."

He then turned to Jehu Josh.

"Come! climb down off your box, for I want you to give me a lift!"

"Give ye a lift on what?" demanded Josh.

"On the other passenger!" replied Phil. "He's been shot, and may be dead, for all I know."

"Humph! Who shot him?"

"I don't know, more than that some one fired in through the win'ow back here a piece, and the bullet hit Brewster."

"Brewster?"

"Yes, Brewster. That's the other passenger's name. Are you going to give me a lift or not?" Josh clambered down from his seat, and with his aid, Phil succeeded in getting Bartley Brewster out of the coach.

He had not yet lost consciousness, but was so weak from the loss of blood, that he was unable to stand.

So Phil and Josh assisted him to walk, and finally got him into the hotel.

The lower part of this structure, singularly enough, was all in one huge apartment, from which a rude stairway led to the upper rooms.

The lower room was used as a bar-room, gaming-room and dance-hall, in addition to which there was a rifle-range, and a roped-off, platformed space for pugilistic encounters.

The furniture was of rough description, and no doubt harmonized well with the characters who were *habitués* of the den.

Just such another peculiar place would be hard to find in all Arizona. For here men, women and children mingled as freely and familiarly, as though they were at some fair or festal gathering.

Brewster was supported to a bench, at one side of the room, where he was assisted to lie down, a crowd of the *habitués* of the place gathering around in evident curiosity.

"What's the matter of him?" a chorus of voices demanded, eagerly.

"As we were coming in on the stage, some cuss fired in through the window, and salivated him," Philo Fly replied. "Stand back! don't crowd so close around!" Phil added, with the air of one who had the authority to command.

"Is there a doctor or surgeon in this camp?"

"I reckon we're all our own doctors!" was the reply, with a chuckle, as a woman pushed forward. "Where's the chap plugged?"

Phil gave the speaker a keen scrutiny, before answering her question.

He immediately formed the conclusion that this was Black Mag, the proprietress of the den. Her face, with the exception of her eyes, was entirely covered by a thick black veil, through which no telling outline of her features was perceptible.

Then, too, she was dressed entirely in black, even to the jaunty hat upon her head, and the faultlessly-fitting gloves upon her hands.

Judging by her voice she was yet a young woman, although by her name, Phil had formed the impression that she was some old and toothless hag.

"The wound is in the left breast, I believe!" Phil said, in answer to her query. "If you can give us a room, I will try and get him to it, so we can make an examination, with more privacy."

"Very well. You can be accommodated. Here, Butch, assist the gentleman to carry the sick man up to the best room!"

At Black Mag's call, a burly individual, with a prize-fighter's cast of countenance, came forward, and assisted Phil to lift Brewster, and carry him up the creaking stairs, where, after twisting about through several dark and narrow halls, they finally entered a fair-sized room, that looked out at the front of the building.

If this was the best room, Phil wondered at what to expect of the others; for here there was no carpet, the floor being covered with bear and wolf-skin rugs, while the only furniture consisted of a rickety table, an apology of a bed, a tin wash-basin and broken pitcher, and a couple of stools.

With some difficulty Brewster was undressed, and put to bed; then sending Butch off for some liquor, Phil proceeded to examine the wound.

He was not unskilled at such work, and always carried a pocket case of various little necessities with him, which frequently came in handy for use.

First stanching the flow of blood, and after some probing, he found and extracted the bullet, which he had traced along the strong upper rib. This gave him great satisfaction, for it assured him that the wound was not mortal.

Brewster stood the painful ordeal with commendable grit, and after it was over, and he had partaken of a little stimulant, he announced that he was somewhat relieved of his pain.

"You have been very kind to me, and if I recover from this cowardly attempt upon my life, you shall not go unrewarded."

"Don't mention it!" Phil replied. "All I have done is but what any man should do toward another. Have you any idea who the man was, who fired the shot?"

"Ah! did you see a man?"

"I saw a man's face appear at the window, a moment before the shot was fired. It was

quickly withdrawn, and before I could speak to you, the shot was fired. The face was a most villainous one—that of a man some forty years old, with bloodshot eyes and a couple weeks' stubble of iron-gray beard upon his furrowed face."

Brewster appeared to reflect a moment. "I do not recognize the description," he said, "but, there's no doubt but what the bullet was intended for me. I have an enemy who seeks my life, and that it was which brings me to Claim 10."

"Have you any objections to telling me his name?"

"No. It is Ezra Athol. A month ago I got an inkling that he had been seen here, but could learn no more. So I came on. If you wish, I will tell you my story. But first, remove everything from the pockets of my clothing, and secrete it about your own person, where it will be the safest, until I recover!"

This Philo proceeded to do, and had barely finished, when he was startled by a loud knock, and a gruff voice cried:

"Hello! in thar—open this hyer door!"

CHAPTER III.

"WE FOUND THE MAN DEAD WITH A DAGGER IN HIS HEART."

THE knock was so peremptory and heavy, and the voice so rough and authoritative, that it was little wonder both Phil Fly and Bartley Brewster were startled.

Were they to experience trouble so soon after their arrival in Camp 10?

"Rats!" Phil said, in an undertone, as he slipped Brewster a revolver. "Keep a stiff upper lip, for it may be all right, after all."

Then, aloud, he called out:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want yer to open ther door, an' don't keep a feller standin' all night. I've got a message for ye."

"For who?"

"Fer you—ther young cuss."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Butch McTiger, ther toughest son-of-a-gun in ther town—so ye better hurry up!"

"Who is the message from?"

"Buck Brennan—he's the 'mayor' o' ther camp, an' wants ter see ye about ther feller that shot your pard. So come along, an' no more monkeyin', fer he's waitin' for ye, below. Don't be skeart; no one's goin' to eat you?"

Phil exchanged glances with Brewster.

"You'd better go," the latter said, "fer it may be best to keep on the right side of these people."

"Well, all right, but, look out for yourself, and don't hesitate to use the pop, if any one bothers you!"

Brewster nodded, and advancing to the door, Phil unlocked it.

The towering figure of Butch stood in the hall, outside.

"Come along," he growled. "What ye skeart at, I'd like to know?"

"I'm not frightened!" Phil replied. "Lead on!"

He had a cocked revolver up his coat-sleeve, nevertheless, ready to drop into his grasp, at an instant's notice.

They followed the course of the dark halls again, Phil fully on the alert, and finally descended into the lower apartment.

Here the same crowd was collected as when he first entered, with perhaps a few more roughs added to the list.

One of these leaned with his back against the bar, his elbows resting upon it—a man of large physique, about eight-and-forty years of age, and not so "tough-looking" as the rest of the audience.

Indeed, his large, full-bearded countenance was rather prepossessing, except that the brows were habitually knit into a scowl, and his eyes were of a cold, gray color, and rather stern in their glance.

He was dressed in a rough-and-ready business-suit, and Phil at once concluded that he was Buck Brennan.

And this proved to be correct, for the man motioned Phil to approach, as he spoke:

"Well, young man, I hear you have got some trouble on your hands," critically surveying the young stranger from head to foot.

"Oh! nothing fatal, I hope," Phil replied. "The wound is not so serious as I at first supposed, and I think the gentleman will be about shortly."

"What is his name?"

"Brewster, I believe."

"You believe? Do you not know?"

"Nothing more than that he gave the name on board the stage."

"You never met him before?"

"No, sir."

"Who are you?"

"Philo Fly."

"That is what I said!"

Phil was beginning to feel resentful at this cross-questioning.

"Where are you from, Mr. Fly?"

"Phenix."

"Are you acquainted there?"

"Somewhat."

"You say Mr. Brewster received his wounds while traveling on the stage to-night?"

"He did."

"Please narrate the circumstances."

This Phil proceeded to do, giving a clear and concise statement of what had occurred, even going so far as to explain how he had made futile efforts to hail the stage-driver.

Buck Brennan listened, without comment. When Phil was through, he asked:

"How far from this camp did this shooting take place?"

"About a mile back, I should judge."

"It was dark then?"

"It was."

"Would you recognize the face you saw at the window, if you were to see it again?"

"I am not positive, but I think I would?"

Buck Brennan turned to a bystander.

"Tell Josh to come here!" he said.

Phil Fly of Phenix gave a little start, but no one appeared to notice it.

"I wonder what this means?" was the thought that flashed across his mind. "The stage has not gone on to Alta it appears!"

At the moment, it was the least of his suspicions that there was a purpose to fasten the attempted assassination upon him.

Old Josh soon made his appearance, somewhat unsteady on his legs. That he had been imbibing "Roaring Bull" poison was evident.

"Josh, this young man was one of your passengers, was he not?" queried Brennan.

"Yes, sir; he war one on 'em."

"Where did he board your stage?"

"At Gregory's."

"Where did the other person get on?"

"This side of there, at the Gap!"

"These two passengers rode inside the stage?"

"Ther latter part o' the way!"

"Alone?"

"Yas!"

"See here!" cried Phil, a sudden suspicion darting across his mind, "why all this cross questioning? My attention is more needed upstairs than here!"

"Don't get impatient. We want to get all the facts of this case we can, for, if a willful murder has been attempted, as it undoubtedly has, the matter must be investigated. Josh, did you hear the report of the pistol?"

"I did not!"

"That is strange. If such a weapon had been fired from the outside of the stage, you would likely have heard it, would you not?"

"Waal, you can bet your ace on *that*!" the veteran responded with a nod of his head and a grin.

"I've driven stage too long ter let my heerin' machine git clogged. I can hear ther chirp uv a cricket as fur as a crow kin smell powder!"

"And you heard no pistol report?"

"None."

"Did you hear any one shouting to you, from within the stage?"

"Nix-ce!"

Buck Brennan turned to Phil.

"Stir a hair, and you're a dead chicken!" he said. "for a pair of sixes are at the back of your head!"

Feeling something hard pressed against the rear of his cranium, Phil could but conclude that Brennan spoke the truth.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, indignantly. "Do you dare to intimate that I had a hand in the shooting of Bartley Brewster?"

"That's just what I dare!" Brennan replied, with a cool smile. "You see, my son, I've been on the detective force, in my younger days, and when I heard the report of shooting it did not take me long to arrive at the conclusion that there was something crooked about the case, and that you *might* possibly be implicated in it."

"You see, men are not generally cavorting along highways, and firing at strangers, whom they do not know!"

"But—"

"No buts at all, sir—they won't work, at all. Suspicion points clearly to you, without out even questioning the injured party."

Why, I can see guilt bulging right out of your eyes. Boys, blow his brains out, if he stirs! Some one else get some ropes. We'll have the young lion in bondage!"

"You're an infernal rascal and a cut-throat!" Phil cried, his eyes flashing with rage. "For some reason unknown to me, you have put this charge upon me, well knowing I am not guilty. But, wait, Buck Brennan! It's your play, now, but I'll play later in the game!"

"You never uttered a more forcible truth in your life!" the owner of Claim 10 smiled, complacently. "You will play, later on, but it will be upon a string of hemp!"

Phil made no reply. He was too enraged to express his feelings!

He knew he had been drawn into a trap, and what the consequences would be, Brennan had sarcastically outlined.

He dared not move, nor resist being made a prisoner, and so, practically, was in a bad fix! Some one brought ropes, and Phil's hands were tied securely behind his back.

By an oversight which the lad considered almost miraculous, the cocked revolver up his sleeve, was not discovered!

This revolver was attached by its handle to a strip of rubber fastened on the inside of the sleeve. By a peculiar jerk of his arm the weapon would drop down into his grasp.

His feet were not bound, since there was little danger of his running away, surrounded by a cordon of human beings who looked ugly and savage enough to rend him limb from limb.

"Now!" Buck Brennan said, when Phil had been disarmed of his belt weapons—"now, young man, we don't propose to treat you in a one-sided manner, but judge and sentence you on a fair and square basis. If Brewster is positive you had nothing to do with the shooting, you shall have your liberty. Is that fair or not?"

"You may think so!" was Phil's reply. "If you go by what Brewster says, all right!"

"Very well. Is the man able to speak?"

"He was, when I left him."

"Then, we'll soon settle it. Here are three representative and honest citizens of the place. They will go to Brewster's room and get his verdict. If he clears you, you go free. If he accuses you, we shall hang you at sunrise, that being our regular lynching hour. Gentlemen, do your duty!"

The three chosen men turned away, and Phil saw them ascend the stairs.

Eagerly he watched for their return.

Brewster of course would clear him.

At last the trio returned with grave faces.

"Well, what verdict?" Buck Brennan demanded.

"We got no verdict!" replied one of the men, gravely. "We found the man dead with a dagger in his heart!"

CHAPTER IV.

ACCUSED OF MURDER.

THIS announcement fell like a knell of doom upon the ear of Philo Fly of Phenix, and for a moment he could scarcely believe that he had heard aright.

Brewster dead?

And with a dagger through his heart!

What did it mean?

Who had committed the terrible deed?

What foul conspiracy was there on foot, by which he, Phil, had been decoyed from the room, so that some one else could enter and take Brewster's life?

These and other questions flashed across the young man's mind, with lightning rapidity, and he saw that Old Josh had not foretold wrong when he said they were coming to a bad hole.

The announcement caused a murmur of surprise also to sweep through the assemblage, in the big room, and Buck Brennan uttered an oath!

"Dead, you say!—stabbed through the heart!" he cried. "Then, by heaven, the boy has already accomplished the bloody work he set out to do!"

And he glared sternly at Phil.

But the young man from Phenix returned the look, defiantly.

"You're off your base again!" he retorted.

"When you sent for me, Bartley Brewster was alive, and partly bolstered up, in bed!"

"Bah! You can't fool us, you murderin' whelp! You killed him!"

"You lie, like a thief. I did not, nor do I know who did. I can prove that I didn't, by the man you sent after me—Butch McTiger, as he calls himself. He saw Brewster when I opened the door!"

"Call McTiger," ordered Brennan. "He'll

tell us quick enough whether he saw the fellow alive, or not."

A search was made for McTiger, and he was soon forthcoming.

"You went to the best room, to summon this young man?" queried Brennan.

"You bet!" McTiger assented.

"When he opened the door, did you see the wounded man?"

"No; I only see'd ther bed. I didn't go inside the room, yer see!"

"Then you don't know whether the man was alive or dead?"

"I do not. But, I'll be cussed if I don't think suthin' were the matter!"

"Why so?"

"'Cause I had a thunderin' time gettin the young cuss to come down-stairs. I had to answer about a dozen questions before he'd open the door. He wanted to know who I was, an' what I wanted, an' who you was an' what you wanted, and the divil knows what all, before he opened the door."

"Ah! that is evidence enough that the young villain had just done the bloody deed, and was afraid it would be discovered!" Buck Brennan declared, decisively.

"It's a clear case against you, Mr. Philo Fly, and you die at sunrise. Ain't I right, boys?"

There was a loud shout of assent and approval; people in the room evidently agreed with the mine-owner.

"Ye'd better search the chap!" suggested one of the crowd. "Mebbe you'll find some furdur evidence ag'in' him."

"A capital idea. I'll do it myself," Brennan declared. "We may strike a treasure, if he is a high-handed bandit."

Then he began.

The first thing he found was a large wallet, well filled with money, and containing a diamond ring and pin and a gold watch and chain—the very things Phil had removed from Brewster's garments at that gentleman's solicitation.

"Ah! here is further proof of the young devil's guilt, you see!" Brennan cried; "for here's Brewster's wallet, with his name marked in it. It contains a sum of money and a diamond ring and pin."

"I came honestly by that wallet!" Phil spoke up, quickly. "Brewster told me to take charge of it until he recovered."

"Oh! without a doubt," sneered Brennan, thrusting the wallet into his own pocket. "Let's see what else you have got about your duds."

All that was discovered was another roll of money, amounting to some four hundred dollars.

"Another fat hoodle!" commented Brennan. "No doubt but what it cost some other good man his life. I'll take care of it until some one calls for it."

"That's my money!" cried Phil, "and you're a thief if you take it."

"Bah! even if it is your money, you will never need it, as you'll go where money ain't any good at sunrise. You're a bloody-handed murderer, and a cute cuss-in-general, no doubt, but you struck the wrong camp when you came to Claim 10."

"That remains to be told, Buck Brennan!" Phil cried, his voice ringing sternly. "I'm not dead yet, by a long shot! And mark my word, I'll have a bitter revenge for this outrage!"

"Ye're not dead, eh?"

"No, I am not!"

"And you'll have a bitter revenge?"

"Yes, I will. I'm no baby, if not quite a man in years, and I've made more than one man quake with fear in the past. So beware! If I am not set at liberty at once, I will live to make every mother's son of you hold in terror the name of Deadwood Dick, Junior!"

"Of what?" cried Brennan, in surprise.

"You heard what I said—Deadwood Dick, Junior! Did you ever hear of Deadwood Dick?—once an outlaw, later a detective, and always a dare-devil and avenger of the wrongs of those who were too weak to strike for themselves! You have heard of him, eh?—I can read it in your face."

"Then know that I am his namesake and his counterpart! I neither fear you nor your vengeance, nor do I fear death. I have faced it before, and can face it again; but those who would have murdered me have paid the penalty with their own lives. So take warning!"

"I was warned that I was venturing into a nest of thieves and murderers ere I came here, but was ready to meet you face to face, and fight you man to man; but I did not anticipate a conspiracy to entrap me, more especially when

I brought into your midst a badly wounded man."

"But, now, I know that you are a set of human vultures and cut-throats. Not satisfied with entrapping me into captivity, you have murdered my helpless friend, and then tried to lay the blame on my shoulders; but, by heavens, I will live to bet you yet, and whether you know me as Philo Fly, or as Deadwood Dick Junior, I'll make you repent this night's work."

"Bravo!" cried Buck Brennan, mockingly. "You made a mistake when you didn't study for the ministry, or else high tragedy, for ther' ain't much difference atwixt the two, hang me if there is. But, my dear Fly, we haven't the least fear of being troubled in the future by your vengeance—no, not the least. As sure as the sun rises to-morrow, that sure will you have such a troublesome sensation in the region of your throat that you will forget all these idle boasts."

The mine-owner then stepped aside, and held a low conversation with the three men who had previously gone up-stairs to visit Brewster.

These men were more respectably dressed than the rest of the "Roaring Bull's" patrons, except Buck Brennan, and did not have that ruffianly stamp of features which nearly all the rest had.

After a short consultation with them, Brennan once more approached the prisoner.

"Well, young man!" he said, "there seems to be no doubt about your guilt, and so we shall have to carry out the rule that has prevailed here ever since this claim was settled—that is, lynch every murderer and horse thief caught. So at sunrise you die. As you are rather a frisky individual, it won't do to lock you up in any store-room in this camp, so I reckon the safest place we can put you for the night will be down in the deserted shaft. It's sixty feet deep, and there's no danger of your getting out before we want you."

Phil's feet were then bound together, after which he was raised bodily between McTiger and another burly ruffian, and carried from the hotel.

The night, by this time, was intensely dark, but the mob which followed the bearers of the prisoner were well equipped with lanterns, so there was no difficulty in finding the abandoned shaft, which had never been worked as no paying vein of ore had been struck.

The windlass and sheet-iron bucket still occupied positions over the shaft.

Phil was immediately placed into this bucket; then several roughs manned the crank, and he was lowered into the stygian gloom.

Down! down! down!

Then, after a while, the men reversed the motion, and slowly hauled the bucket upward.

When it reached the open air again, it was empty.

Phil Fly, of Phenix, was far, far below, in his cold rocky prison, with no hope of getting out, until he should be hauled up for execution.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHAFT SPRITE.

THE feeling of Phil Fly, as he was being lowered into the shaft, would be hard to describe.

To throw himself from the bucket meant death upon the rocky bottom of the pit.

There was nothing to do but submit to being lowered down, down, into this prison from which there could be no escape, without assistance from the outer world.

Phil naturally expected that the bucket would descend clear to the bottom, but he was disagreeably disappointed, for when he calculated he could not be far from the bottom, the bucket suddenly upset, and tumbled him out.

He fell a distance of some four or five feet, before landing, but, with the exception of a few bruises, he sustained no injuries.

Being bound hand and foot, there was of course nothing for him to do but sit there, in the bottom of the shaft, and reflect upon the unpleasant situation his coming to Claim 10 had got him into.

Here he was, a prisoner in the bowels of the earth, with no hope of getting out, and, looking forward to the forthcoming sunrise, what was in store for him?

Nothing but the uncomfortable promise that he would be lynched, in accordance with the custom of the camp, as Buck Brennan had expressed it.

"This, as may be supposed, was not an edifying outlook for the young detective.

He had already seen enough of the people of Claim 10 to satisfy him that they were a flock

of human vultures of the worst order, and, what was more—Buck Brennan the mine-owner appeared to be a ruling spirit among them.

"It looks as if my jig is up for sure, this time!" he mused, gloomily. "Brewster is dead they say, and who else in this camp would have compassion enough on me, to come to my rescue? But, then, I am not very well satisfied that Brewster is dead! There's some mystery about him, and this Claim 10, and—jingo! but wouldn't I like to get free, so I could solve it!"

"Wishing was one thing, but getting free was quite another, it occurred to him just then, and a feeling almost of despair came over him.

Fully four hours must have passed when he was startled by something that gave him a momentary ray of hope.

It was a pebble, falling at his feet.

The force with which it struck bottom convinced the prisoner that it must have fallen from the shaft mouth.

What did it mean?

Was somebody up there who was going to attempt his rescue?

He waited several minutes, in almost painful suspense, but no more pebbles dropped.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, "it was foolish of me to expect that any one would come to my rescue! The stone dropped off of the side of the shaft, no doubt."

And so he gave up hope, in that direction, and set about trying to stretch the cords that bound his wrists.

But, it was a futile effort. The cords had been so tied that they were unyielding, and he finally had to give it up as a bad job.

So, hitching along over the rough rocks, he at last found a wall to lean against, and proceeded to make himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

He had hardly got thus fixed, however, when he felt something drop upon his outstretched feet, and it took him but a moment to make out what it was.

"A rope!" he cried, joyously. "Sure enough, some one is coming to my rescue!—or maybe it is to murder me!"

But why should any one wish to take his life in the pit, when he was already sentenced to be lynched at sunrise?

By catching the rope, with his teeth he was enabled to tell whether any one was coming down it or not.

After a wait of several seconds, jerky movements, apprised him some one was sliding down it.

Releasing his hold upon it, he crawled to one side, so as not to be trodden on.

At last, footsteps upon the bottom, announced that the unknown visitor had arrived safely at his destination.

Phil remained perfectly quiet, curious to know what was the next thing on the programme, for he considered it judicious to let the new-comer break the silence.

A moment later, the cap of a bull's-eye lantern was removed, and a flood of light streamed forth.

A cry of astonishment escaped Phil.

His visitor was not a man, as he naturally had reason to expect, but instead, was a girl!

She was about sixteen years old, as well as Phil was able to judge, rather stout and plump of figure, but really good-looking, except that she was somewhat sun-tanned and freckled, and wore a shock of reddish hair, cut boy fashion. Her eyes were bright and roguish, and her mouth, a trifle large, but filled by two rows of pearly teeth, was fully as roguish of expression, as her eyes.

Evidently she was the possessor of a joyous disposition, as well as of a stout heart.

She was dressed in a simple calico skirt and bodice, the skirt short enough to expose a shapely pair of ankles, but wore no shoes or stockings, nor any hat or hood or bonnet upon her head.

Here was truly a typical specimen of a rustic Western girl, and Phil Fly of Phenix could but gaze at her, in surprise and admiration.

"Hello! there!" she saluted, as she flashed the light of her lantern upon Deadwood Dick Junior. "So you're here, are you, Mister Phil Fly of Phenix?"

"I should presume to remark that I am!" Phil replied.

"What's your name?"

"Phil Fly. And yours?"

"Oh! my name's Jim."

"Jim?"

"Yes. That's what they call me, up in camp."

"But you have another name?"

"Not's I knows on. Never had none that I ever heard of, nor no one else, I reckon."

"But, you have parents, or relatives?"

"Nary! I was born of a blizzard."

"What?"

"I was snowed down, from up above. They say I come down in a blizzard, them as purtends to know. A shoutin' Methodist preacher picked me up, as I was kickin' 'bout an' took me in out o' the cold; he kinder 'dopted me, you see, an' fetched me up ter walk in the way of the lamb, as he used to say. But, the lamb an' I could trot the same way as well as we might, an' we uster make Pap Perkins lots of trouble. Pap finally skipped up the golden stairs, about a year ago, and since then, I've been my own boss."

"So, there, you've got my hull hist'ry, in a nutshell. Supposin' you give us yourn!"

"I haven't any to give!" Phil replied, "that would interest you. Did you come down here to rescue me?"

"I guess so. You look like a good sort of feller, and I don't like to see good fellers in trouble. I see'd 'em chuck you down here, and I thought mebbe you might want to get out. So I slid down the rope to see."

"Well, you can bet I am glad you came," Phil answered, heartily, "for I've been feeling rather glum over the prospect of getting my neck stretched, in the morning. If you will cut these cords that bind me, I will be very thankful to you."

Jim set the lantern upon a rock, and taking a penknife from her pocket, freed the young detective of his bonds, in a jiffy, so that he was able to regain his feet.

"Ah! free at last, by good fortune! I warned Buck Brennan that I would yet be free, and then he and the people of Claim 10 could expect my vengeance, and I did not lie to him. I will make them feel my power, as they never felt that of any other man!"

"But tell me, little girl, why is it that Buck Brennan had me arrested on a false charge? What reason has he for being my enemy? for upon my word, I never saw or heard of him before!"

Jim drew back, with flashing eyes.

"Little girl!" she repeated. "Humph! I guess I am purty near as big as you are!"

Phil laughed, heartily.

"Sure enough! I had forgotten that. I hope you will excuse me, Miss Jim!"

"Jim's good enough for me, without any Miss hitched on, young feller."

"All right; Jim it is, then. But, you haven't answered my question, yet."

"Well, I don't know that Buck has got any more of a grudge ag'in' you than he has ag'in' every pilgrim that comes to this camp. Thar's a notice put up that no strangers are wanted here, and them that don't heed it generally turns up missing. Most who reads the notice don't waste much time a-movin' on."

"Ah! The mystery deepens," Phil said, more to himself than to the girl.

"The what, did you say?"

"The mystery that overhangs Claim 10!"

Jim laughed oddly.

"You don't know half about ther mystery as goes on 'round here, and if you value yer coakynut, you won't go pryin' around to find out!"

"But that's the very thing what I propose to do, my little charmer, and I want you to put me onto all the points you can."

"Me?"

"Yes, you! I twig your shrewdness at a glance. You may be as close-mouthed as a clam, but there's little goes on about this camp that you don't know something about!"

Jim looked pleased at this bit of flattery.

"Are you a detective?" she asked, toying with a corner of her apron, and looking up at him curiously.

"I am. Why do you ask?"

"Oh! because I allus thought I'd like to get a look at one, to see what it looked like!"

It was Philo's turn to indulge in a hearty laugh.

"Well, you see it before you," he said; "what do you think of it?"

"Oh! you ain't so bad, only I tho't detectives had hook noses and hawk-eyes. You better not let the gang git onto it that you're a detective, or they'll hunt you clear out of Arizona."

"They're not partial to detectives, eh?"

"Well, I guess not! That's why every feller's snapped up, what persists in stoppin' off heer. I see'd a young feller come here, sellin' jewelry, about a week ago, but he suddenly turned up missing!"

"This matter must surely be investigated!" Phil said, emphatically. "If wholesale murder is being carried on here, it is high time it was

stopped. What is the secret these human wolves seem to be so zealously guarding?"

"Go ask 'em, I don't know, and I've lived here over two years."

"Does the claim pan out well?"

"Not very. Them as works it only makes a bare livin', and I guess Buck Brennan ain't gettin' rich, tho' they say he's got plenty o' rocks to fall back on."

"Does he employ all the people here?"

"Yes, them that works. There's some as loaf around Mag's, and never work."

"How do they get their living?"

"That's more than I can tell you. They let on to get it by gambling, but I don't believe they win their salt at that."

"Do you visit the 'Roaring Bull'?"

"Not lately. Black Mag gives me the bounce."

"Who is she?"

"Who is she? You know as much about it as I do. She was here when I struck Claim 10, just as you see her now."

"And so, Buck Brennan, the mine-owner, is in collusion with this gang of toughs that hang out at Black Mag's den?"

"I don't know. To-night is the first time I ever know'd him to show his hand in any sech a circus. Heretofore he has allus fought shy of Mag's place, and stood in with the better lot o' folks in the camp, who, though they dassen't say much, are bitter against Mag and her crowd!"

"Was it not Buck Brennan, then, who put out the notice you mentioned, warning strangers not to stop off here?"

"Nix-ee. That was Red Ruthven!"

"Ah! The road-agent?"

"Yes. How did you hear of him?"

"The stage-driver mentioned something about him. What do you do for a living?"

"Oh! There's a little placer dirt on the claim, and I work that, on shares, when I do anything."

"Indeed! I should think, young and unprotected by relatives, as you are, you would be afraid to remain in such a disreputable camp."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid. No one dares to lay a finger on me for fear of getting a through trip ticket to the next world!"

"Why, surely, these burly ruffians do not stand in fear of a little body like you?"

"I wish you'd stop callin' me little!" Jim said, petulantly. "If the galoots ain't exactly scared of me, they are of my friend!"

"Who is he?"

"Red Ruthven. He's given 'em all fair warnin' that if harm comes to me he'll make it the last sickness fer the one as offended me. Ain't he old lemons, though?"

"I should say so, and I shall take pleasure in echoing his sentiments, my young friend. I don't suppose it's any of my business, to inquire who this Red Ruthven is?"

"No, not a bit. Come, it's time we were getting out of here, before we are discovered. Besides, I've got an engagement to meet my high-toned beau, yet to-night!"

"Ah! you have a beau, then?"

"You bet. He's scrumptious, too—wears a plug hat, diamonds, a gold-headed cane, and kid gloves. Oh! he's a real lord, from England, where he owns a castle, what you read about. He's puttin' up at the Brennan's, an' they say he's goin' to marry that stuck up Beatrice, but he ain't if I can help it. He's sweet on me, an' buys me candy, and I'm goin' to set my cap for him!"

"His name?"

"Is Lord Derby Dudley. But, come; we must get up out of here."

"I will climb up first, and then pull you up!" Philo said, quickly.

"All right. You'll find I'm not so little as you think, when you come to pull me up!" Jim replied, with a laugh.

"I could pull up two like you!" Philo declared, and in a moment more, he was climbing the rope, hand over hand, up through the dark shaft.

It was no easy job, to one unaccustomed a superabundance of muscle and grit will accomplish many almost incredible things, and due time he reached the top of the shaft, swung himself out upon the platform.

He then turned, and groped toward the c of the windlass, when he was seized by several pairs of strong hands, and borne backward to the ground, where, in a jiffy, he was bound and helpless, with a gag thrust into his mouth.

CHAPTER VI.

A BRUTE'S WORK.

Yes; Phil was a prisoner—there was no denying that.

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The tarry had been too long in the bottom of the pit, as Jim had hinted.

Among the exultant faces which the young detective saw peering down at him was that of the owner of Claim 10—Buck Brennan.

"Ho, ho!" he chuckled; "so you thought you wouldn't stay down in the shaft, did you, my darling young desperado? You thought you'd escape your just punishment, and have the laugh on us, eh? But, you see we were too fly for you. It struck me that young minx, Jim, might make an attempt to rescue you, so we just laid around, so as to nab you when you came up!"

Philo made no attempt to answer.

He could not have uttered an intelligible word had he tried, owing to the gag in his mouth.

His not making an effort to speak appeared to aggravate Brennan, for he immediately ordered the removal of the gag, which was done.

"Now, then, what do you think we ought to do with you, for attempting to escape the custody of the law?" he demanded, sternly, by an ominous scowl, evidently trying to strike terror into the prisoner's heart.

Phil, however, only laughed defiantly.

"What law?" he asked. "You don't pretend to say you have any law in this hell-hole?"

"We do pretend to say just that!" Brennan growled, "and you'll find we intend to enforce it to the letter, too. You are convicted of murder, and shall hang at sunrise. But that's not all. You have just attempted to escape the vengeance of the law, which is a misdemeanor; so, before you are hung you are entitled to punishment for the misdemeanor. Now, then, sir, which do you prefer? To be tied up by your wrists to the limb of a tree, from now till morning, or take a flogging of fifty lashes. You're bound to get one or the other—so take your choice."

"Supposing I don't prefer to make any choice?" Phil said, still defiantly.

"Then you'll get both punishments for your contrariness!" sneered Brennan. "There's no use of your imagining you can bluff us a bit, for we can cool down a young colt like you just as easy as rolling off a log. You're in for it, and you'll get it, with a vengeance. So make up your mind which you'll have, as a choice!"

"I presume, you black-hearted wretch!" cried Phil, fiercely, "that if I had any choice between the two evils, I should prefer to take the flogging. But remember, sir, and hear me swear it, that for every lash I receive I'll have a drop of your heart's blood! You'll find me less merciful than a Joaquin Murieta!"

"Bah! bosh! Don't think I heed your babyish threats, for I don't. Boys, seize him, and take him to the tree near the pool!"

Several of the ruffians raised Phil between them and bore him to the edge of a sluggish pool of water, where a strong young sapling grew upon the bank.

Here the clothing was stripped from his body, and he was securely lashed to the tree.

The hour was past midnight, and the business and dwelling part of the camp was wrapped in silence.

Only about a dozen roughs were with Brennan.

The others of the camp probably knew nothing what was going on, and had turned in, for the night.

As soon as Phil was securely lashed to the tree, the men gathered around with lanterns, while a bull-whip was produced, and seized by Buck Brennan.

"Now, then, we'll hear the young desperado howl!" he cried; with a grim laugh. "This will be only a foretaste of what he will get when he gets to the place where we're going to send him, at sunrise."

"One!"

Hauling off, he laid on the lash again and again, drawing a bloody welt all over Phil's

back, with teeth set tightly, the victim made no outcry; not even a groan escaped him.

Buck Brennan paused a moment in his cruel task, his face expressing much surprise.

"Well, I'll be cursed if the young devil ain't more grit than I gave him credit for!" he exclaimed.

"Take a look at him, McTiger; maybe he's fainted away!"

"No! I have not fainted!" Phil cried, his voice hoarse with passion.

"You may as well go on with your work, you hellion, and derive what satisfaction you can out of it, for if ever I get free, your life will answer for this outrage."

"Oh! I'm not done, yet!" Brennan replied, and again swung the lash.

"Halt!"

Like a roll of thunder, so deep and sonorous the voice, came the challenge.

Brennan had evidently heard that voice, before, for he gazed around in a startled way.

"Enough of this inhuman work, Buck Brennan," came in the same stern tones, again.

"Strike that boy another blow at the deadly displeasure of Red Ruthven!"

Then, a horse's footfalls, were heard slowly receding from the vicinity.

Buck Brennan had turned pale, either with rage or fear, it was hard to tell which, and had at once dropped the whip to the ground.

"Unlash the boy," he ordered; "we'll shut him up in Randal's unoccupied shanty, and post a guard outside. He'll be too weak to break out, and get away from an armed guard!"

"Yas, fer he's fainted, already," announced Butch McTiger. "Begorra, an' I don't wonder at it myself, cuss my boots ef I do—eh? boys? I'm ther toughest son-of-a-gun in this hyer camp an' I'd be kicked inter corn-cobs if I'd like to take that air dose!"

Phil's bonds were cut, and being to all appearances insensible, he fell backward to the ground.

He was at once picked up, and his garments hurried onto him; then, he was carried to the Randal shanty, which had been completed only that very day, and was yet unoccupied, for sticks and shavings were yet strewn about the floor.

Philo was deposited in one corner of the room, and then Snalberg, one of the ruffians, with a lantern beside him, and a cocked revolver in his hand, seated himself upon a box, to keep vigil, until morning, while Brennan and the rest of the gang took their departure, to hunt up Jim, the girl miner.

When the people of Claim 10 awoke, the next morning, Randal's cabin had been reduced to a smoking heap of ashes, scarcely an unconsumed timber remaining.

Great was the excitement when the fact became known. Search was made among the ashes, and bones of a human skeleton were discovered. There were only a few of them, however, the others having probably cremated into ashes.

Snalberg was nowhere to be found.

So the question was—had both he and Philo Fly of Phenix been incinerated?

CHAPTER VII.

BRENNAN'S SIREN.

WE next look down upon the camp of Claim 10, about two weeks after the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

We will visit the residence of William Brennan, the mine-owner, better known in the camp as Buck Brennan.

His house was about the only one in the camp that laid any claims to being a comfortable residence, being two-stories in height, and though rough of external appearance, was quite comfortably finished, inside, and comfortably furnished.

It was evening, and the mine-owner sat in an easy-chair, in his parlor, and while smoking a cigar, he glanced over the columns of an Eastern paper, which that evening's mail had brought him.

He wore a silk smoking-cap, and a handsome dressing gown, and all in all, looked little like the vengeful man who had applied thirty lashes to the back of Philo Fly of Phenix, only a fortnight before.

As he perused the paper, he would occasionally pass his hand over his eyes, as if to shut out some horrible vision; then, after a moment, he would go on reading again, though it was apparent he scarcely knew what he was perusing.

Finally, as if impatient at himself, he touched a bell upon the table at his right.

"Confound it, I must be out of sorts to-night!" he muttered, and must have something to stimulate me. Some indescribable sense of danger seems weighing upon my mind. I must get rid of it by satisfying myself that everything is right."

A Chinese servant entered—the only Chinese in the camp, by the way, and a typical specimen of his race.

"John!" said the master, "bring me the bottle of brandy, out of the closet; then tell your mistress I want to see her."

"Allee rightee! allee rightee!"

"And after that, tell McTiger I want to see him!"

"Allee rightee. Some more wantee?"

"No! Get out!"

"Allee rightee. Allee samee quick—like 'Mell-can man!" the Celestial replied, and hurried away, only to return in a few minutes with a bottle of brandy and glasses.

He then disappeared again, and a few minutes later the door opened, and a young woman entered—not a girl by any means, but a female of magnificent face and form, who was on the shady side of thirty, and richly attired; a ravishing blonde, with soft creamy complexion, brilliant dark eyes, and cherry lips—such a creature as an old bachelor would go into ecstasies over, but a little too dignified to create an impression on a younger heart.

"Ah! Beatrice, my child, you are prompt!" the mine-owner said, graciously, as she glided forward, and knelt beside his chair. "I've been having the blues for over an hour, and was obliged to send for you, to cheer me up."

"You know I am always willing to do all in my power to make you cheerful, my dear," was the reply, as she stroked his silken beard. "What is it that troubles you, my Willie?"

"I scarcely know, myself, pet, except it is a vague sense of coming trouble. Is everything working well?"

"So far as I know, it is. I've seen no cause for uneasiness or alarm, and you know I am always on the alert!"

"Have you finished the last plate?"

"Not quite, but shall do so to-morrow. I have also mastered the signature of Mr. — of Sacramento, so that he could not deny it himself. I shall have a check operated at once."

"Very good. I have feared that that accursed young spy, Philo Fly of Phenix, might turn up again. I have not been quite able to make myself believe that he perished in the flames."

"Pshaw! Have no doubts about that. If he had escaped he would have made some stir, ere this."

"I am not so sure about that. He is a shrewd young customer, and has the grit of half a dozen ordinary men. I've been inquiring into his antecedents, and find that there is a Deadwood Dick, Junior, who has been operating as a detective in other parts of the Territory, in the interests of the California authorities, and there's no longer any doubt in my mind but what this Philo Fly was the same chap, just as he claimed."

"Oh! well, whether he was or not it don't matter much, for there's no doubt but what he's safely out of the way, now. If the check on — of Frisco works well, we shall not want to tarry long in this vicinity, anyhow."

"Very true. I see by my advertisement in this Frisco paper that Claim 10 is for sale at a low figure!"

"Indeed! You'd better destroy the paper at once, for if any of Mag's gang were to get hold of it there would be trouble."

"No danger of any one in this camp seeing the notice. Even if they did, I could tell them it was a hoax. If any purchasers come along I shall be on the lookout for them. After the plate is finished and worked, and the check manipulated, and that other matter arranged, it would be high time for us to get out of the wilderness, as the saying goes. But, let me ask, how is the matter with his lordship, progressing?"

"As well as can be expected. Indeed, I think he is on the eve of proposal, as I have drawn him on, well. To-night is just as likely to settle the matter, as not."

"Well, play your cards skillfully. If he has any considerable wealth about him, get all of it away from him you can, besides making him give you a negotiable draft on the bank of London, for twenty thousand pounds. If he is as wealthy as he pretends, he will not hesitate a moment to do this, in order to get my charming daughter, for his bride."

"Do you think he suspects?"

"Bah! no. Didn't you successfully work Hood, of Denver, on the same racket, and he was enough sight sharper a man, than this gawk of an English snob?"

"Better not let him hear you call him a gawk," Beatrice reminded, "or our fat will be in the fire. By the way, have you observed that Lord Derby has been making a good deal of that bare-footed Jim?"

"I have noticed it, but there's no use of our interfering. He's probably interested in her outlandish ways—that's all."

"I hate the little red-headed minx!" Beatrice declared spitefully. "I never hated any one so much in all my life as I do her."

"Because she makes faces at you?" smiled the mine-owner.

"Not for that, alone. Somehow I seem to take a natural dislike for her."

"I'd give a deal to know who she is, and why Red Ruthven self-constitutes himself her protector!" Brennan said, a dark scowl knitting his brows, at the mention of the road-agent's name.

"I presume you would rather know who Red Ruthven is himself, wouldn't you?" Beatrice asked.

"I'll know, ere long," was the grim reply. "I'll lay a trap for him that he cannot help falling into. You may go now, for I hear Lord Dudley entering the house, and you cannot afford to miss drawing him into a game of cards, and making love to him, between times."

Beatrice bowed, and kissing him, arose and swept from the room, with the carriage of a queen, watched by the admiring gaze of the mine-owner—watched by a keen pair of eyes, that peered over the back of a sofa, directly in the mine-owner's rear.

"Where—ay! where could I ever get another such a prize!" Brennan muttered, aloud, when Beatrice had left the room. "At first I was sorry for making the alliance, but, that was because I did not know her worth, which I have since so practically and profitably tested. Ha! ha! she's a jewel, and no mistake."

He touched the call bell, which brought the Chinese servant into the room.

"Send McTiger!" was Brennan's brief order. "Allee rightee; me tellee he!" and John scampered away.

In the course of a couple of minutes, Butch McTiger entered the parlor.

"Waal, boss, heer I am!" he announced, as he paused near the mine-owner. "What's wanted?"

"I merely wanted to know how matters stood," was the reply.

"Oh! everything's snug as a bug in a rug!" the ruffian replied. "Ye need not feel a bit uneasy on that score, boss—not a bit."

"Very well. Be sure you mind your P's and Q's, and I'll make it solid with you," Brennan said, appearing much relieved. "Does the brown appear any more tractable?"

"Not a bit, boss. That filly will prove a hard one to break in."

"I presume so. How about the sorrel?"

"Improv' fast. If he war given the rein, I'd bet my pile he could go it in two-forty."

"Well, keep a close watch over them, and see that they are well fed. I'll take a look at 'em, to-morrow, maybe. You may go."

And so McTiger also shuffled out of the room. The mine-owner then turned to his table, and took a wallet from his pocket.

It was the same one, belonging to Bartley Brewster, that he had two weeks ago taken from Philo Fly of Phenix.

From it he extracted a document consisting of several closely written pages, and laid it on the table.

He then restored the wallet to his pocket, and was about to examine the document, when the sound of a footstep upon the carpet, caused him to wheel quickly around.

"Red Ruthven!" burst from his lips, followed by an oath.

"Just so!" was the cool reply of the intruder, in a deep, sonorous voice. "I don't see why you should be so apparently surprised. If I am not mistaken, I believe this is the date of the month when Red Ruthven goes around calling among his friends and acquaintances. To neglect you would be an irreparable breach of courtesy, would it not?"

CHAPTER VIII.

RED RUTHVEN'S SQUEEZE.

It was evident that Mr. Red Ruthven was a most unwelcome visitor, judging by the savage scowl upon Buck Brennan's face.

And, in appearance, Red Ruthven was not such an appearing gentleman as might be considered a welcome guest in any person's parlor.

He was tall and brawny, at a glance, a man of prodigious strength, and clad in a suit of scarlet with knee boots, slouch sombrero, and a full red mask of fine woven wire covering his features.

His hat was worn slouched down upon his head in such a manner that it could not easily be told what color his short cut hair was.

About his waist was a belt, containing no less than four revolvers and two knives. Plainly, he was well enough armed to resist a platoon of enemies.

He drew a chair around facing Buck Brennan, and seated himself with as much complacency as though he were not an outlaw, with a price upon his head, and "wanted" for numerous stage robberies.

"Yes, really, I should think you would be glad to see me," he repeated, smiling at Bren-

nan's glare of hatred, "considering how lenient I have been with you."

"Oh! I am, without doubt!" Buck replied, with withering sarcasm. "I don't know of a man I would rather receive as a visitor, than you. Curse you, I've a mind to throttle you!"

And fury incarnate blazed in the mine-owner's eyes!

"Please don't!" Red Ruthven pleaded mockingly. "You know how fragile I am, and you should not think of harming one so much your inferior!"

"Curses on you, what do you want?"

"What do I always want when I call?"

"Oh! money!" and Brennan grated his teeth, savagely. "But, you'll not get it this time!"

"Oh! yes I will!" and there was a spice of menace in his tone. "I am positive I will, Ez—"

"Stop!" Brennan cried, quickly. "Dare to utter that and I'll murder you where you sit!"

"Bah! what a baby's threat! as I know your secret without your even knowing or suspecting who I am, what's the use of making a fool of yourself? You're in my power, and it's no use for you to rant and rave about it. Money is what makes the mare go, and that's what I'm after, as my mare won't work without oats!"

Buck Brennan again grated his teeth, and glared reflectively at the floor.

"I know what your thoughts are," Red Ruthven went on, coolly. "You're getting pretty near done here, in Claim 10, and you've a notion to defy me, thinking you can escape ere officers of the law can be put on your track. Now, let me tell you, don't dream of such a thing! I don't intend to allow any interference of that sort myself. As long as I get my monthly stipend, I'm O. K. When it ceases, look out for me! I'm not the only one you have to fear, I presume you know."

"How so?" and Brennan looked startled.

"Well, in the first place, there's a detective in this town, lying shady, and waiting for a chance to nab you as soon as you get out of calling distance of your ruffianly minions!"

"You refer to that fellow—?"

"Philo Fly, of Phenix—exactly. Mind, I don't say he is a detective, or anything of the sort, but he's got it in for you, and you have good and sufficient cause to tremble. I wouldn't exactly crave his enmity myself!"

"Pshaw! he is dead!"

"I hope you'll sleep easy in that belief. If I were in your boots, I should feel easier, if I were sure!"

Buck Brennan gnawed at his under lip, a moment, fiercely; then sprung suddenly to his feet and confronted the outlaw.

"Red Ruthven, I demand to know who you are!" he cried, almost furiously. "There is no use of concealing your identity from me any longer. If I am in your power, now, I would be just as much in your power if I knew who you were."

"Exactly; but, you see, I don't propose to give you the desired information. I prefer to withhold it until later. If you were to go back over your long and checkered career of sin, shame and crime, and recount to yourself all whom you had bitterly wronged, I doubt, then, if you would be able to tell who I am. There is such a thing, you know, of having so many implacable enemies that you can't tell which from which!"

Brennan made no reply, but paced to and fro across the room, his jaws set so tightly as to give his beard a bristling appearance.

"Well!" he said at last, "you say you come for money. But for that accursed affair at San Diego I could laugh at you and defy you. How much do you want?"

"The same as usual—a cool autumnal thousand, which you ought not object to giving, as it secures your safety!"

Brennan made no reply for several minutes, but continued to pace up and down the floor.

"How long are these demands going to continue?" he finally demanded.

"Oh! indefinitely!" smiled Red Ruthven. "When I have accumulated enough so I can buy out some Eastern railroad, or run for Congress, I may have enough; but, even then it will not do you any good, as I have sworn to kill you when I have used you long enough!"

"Curses on you!" hissed Brennan. "Look out I don't kill you first. I am growing daily more desperate, and I cannot, will not stand this subjection. If true, as you say, that you know about that San Diego affair, it matters but little, for they cannot take me out of Arizona without a requisition from the governor!"

"And that has already been issued and signed," Red Ruthven announced. "If you

want to know it, Philo Fly came here to serve it!"

"Bah! It is preposterous to suppose that so important an affair would be intrusted to a mere boy. I do not believe a word of it!"

"Nevertheless, that boy, as you call him, has already secured scoundrels as great as you, and has the whole California detective force at his beck and call."

"What of that? He is dead, so I have nothing to fear of him! Dead detectives tell no tales."

"I miss my guess if he isn't very much alive!" Ruthven declared, candidly. "I'd not stake ten dollars to the contrary."

"Oh! well, of course you would say so. Be it as it may, the young cuss will not dare show his face in Claim 10 again! As for what you may know or suspect about the San Diego affair, a fig for that! You are a robber, an outlaw, and your testimony would not be accepted anywhere. You wouldn't even dare appear against me, as you well know."

"That's where you fool yourself, Mr. Buck. Besides, I may know about more of your rascality than that San Diego matter."

"What?"

And the miner glared at his visitor with almost savage malignity!

While Red Ruthven laughed coolly.

"I may know of others of your transactions," he went on, for your whole career has been one of villainous record. However, that is neither here nor there. As long as you pay my demands it is not likely I shall bother you, for, on a thousand a month I can live well, and lay by a penny for rainy weather. I am here for the money, and I want it! Oh! by the way, however, how is Beatrice making out with his lordship? Why, the woman is old enough to be his mother nearly, and besides, what right has she to marry him?"

Brennan snarled out another oath.

"That's none of your business!" he gritted. "I'd like to know how you come by all your pretended knowledge of my private affairs, and those of my daughter, you accursed scoundrel!"

"Your daughter, you say!" and Red Ruthven laughed most provokingly. "Oh! well, get me the comfortable thousand and I'll be going, and not be bothering you any more, for thirty days. You ought to feel pleased at the respite from my company."

"So I am!" Brennan declared, rising hastily.

"Come along into the next room, and you shall have the money."

"With pleasure," Red Ruthven responded, "but, take care you don't try to play me into any trap, or I'll shoot you so quick it will make your hair fall out."

Then, the two men passed into an adjoining room, the door of which was partly ajar.

No sooner had they left the parlor than a young man climbed out from behind the sofa, where he had lain in concealment, and stealing over to the table, seized the document that Buck Brennan had been about to examine, upon the arrival of Red Ruthven.

A glance at the paper seemed to satisfy the spy that it was what he wanted, for his eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"The very thing!" he chuckled; "and now, as the trail is hot, I can go to work, systematically. You laughed first, Mr. Brennan, and laughed pretty heartily, but my last and best laugh will knock yours all silly! By-by! I suppose when I am gone, and the paper gone, you will accuse Red Ruthven of having taken it. I pity poor Red, that he should be so unjustly accused, but all the same, I can't help it!"

Then this daring individual softly opened the front door, and made good his escape. As the reader no doubt has guessed, he was none other than Philo Fly, of Phenix.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT MR. FLY "TUMBLERD TO."

Yes, it was the redoubtable Philo Fly, of Phenix, who had gained entrance to the Brennan house, purloined the document, and made good his escape.

As may be supposed, he did not linger long in the vicinity of the scene of his bold act, but hied himself out of the camp, through the darkness of the night, as fast as he could walk.

An hour later, he was seated in a snug little mountain dug-out, before a ruddy fire, with the coveted document spread out before him.

"Yes, I scored a big point when I took it into my head to make a quiet sneak into Buck Brennan's house, and if the Honorable Buck knew how much I learned by that visit I fancy he would feel more uneasy than he did in the presence of Red Ruthven. Hang me if I would not

like to know more about Reddy than I do! At the first opportunity I shall seek to form his acquaintance. And, as for this document, well—"

Here the young detective scratched his head, and read the paper over for the third time: It ran as follows:

"This is to certify that I am Florian Flood, of the city of New York, but am traveling at present under the *nom de plum* of Bartley Brewster, traveling the world over in search of my bitterest enemy.

"If I come to an unnatural death, this will tell who I am, as I am well known and connected in New York, and it may be well to add that my murderer will most likely be Ezra Athol, as he is my foe, and once made an attempt upon my life, and would do it again should we meet.

"My story is substantially as follows:

"Two years ago I was a poor young man—a counter-jumper in a metropolitan dry-goods house, at a very small salary, with little hopes of seeing the time when riches should be mine.

"Still I was fond of society, and managed to move in good company, and could believe I had quite a number of warm personal friends.

"It was while employed as a clerk that I met a most charming young lady, named Alma Athol, and she was every bit as pretty as was her name—one of the sweetest little bits of humanity, I thought, on the face of the earth.

"She was the daughter of Ezra Athol, a reputedly wealthy stock speculator, and, as may be supposed, the Athols lived up-town in fine style.

"At first sight I fell in love with Alma, but never dared to show any evidence that she was any dearer to me than the thousand and one of the fair patrons of my counter, until I grew to believe that she had taken a fancy to me, from the fact that she became a daily visitor to the store, and whether making any purchases or not, never missed pausing at my counter for a chat.

"Well, our acquaintance ripened rapidly, and we became lovers, and finally were betrothed. Then it was I went to Ezra Athol, and asked him for his daughter's hand in marriage.

"He emphatically and scornfully refused to give his permission, and denounced me as a fortune-hunting vagabond, and ended by having me forcibly ejected from his house.

"The next day I was, of course through his instrumentality, discharged from my job at the store.

"I no longer could see my Alma, though I watched eagerly for an opportunity, and finally what little I had saved up dwindled down toward nothing, and I had to begin to cast around for a new job.

"One night, late, while passing through Mulberry street, after a wearisome day's unfruitful search, I was knocked senseless by some person who came up behind me. How long I remained insensible I do not know, but when I recovered consciousness I found myself in a damp, underground apartment, where there was no light, and but very little air to breathe.

"Here I was kept a prisoner for a week. Once a day a trap above me was opened, and a loaf of bread and bottle of water were thrown down. One night, when I was asleep, I must have been chloroformed and taken from the place, for when I awoke I found myself lying in a field, miles out in the country.

"Well, I finally worked my way back to New York, intent upon making Ezra Athol smart dearly for what he had caused to be done. When I arrived in the city I learned much to astound me—that Alma Athol had died and had been buried in Greenwood Cemetery only a few days before, and that, immediately afterward, Ezra Athol had failed in a large amount and fled to Canada, taking with him a fortune in money that had been intrusted to him for speculation! The scoundrel had put himself beyond the reach of the law, and ruined many men, and brought poverty to many homes. You can see what a villain he is.

"But, I have not told all, by any means, as the reader of this statement will agree, when I am through.

"I had no suspicion that I had been misinformed about Alma's death, but, mourning her loss, I resolved to visit her grave and did so. Through a former friend I borrowed enough money to make a purchase of some flowers, and these I took to her grave with the intention of planting them upon it.

"While kneeling beside the freshly made mound, something seemed to tell me that Alma's remains did not lie below. The longer I remained the firmer became my conviction, and at last, grown nearly desperate, I arose and left the cemetery.

"But I could not shake off the belief, do what I would, and, as a result, a late hour of that same night found me and a friend in the cemetery, equipped with instruments for opening the grave.

"We did open it, and the coffin, too, and found no corpse, nothing but a heavy log of wood.

"Of course I then knew that Alma was not dead. We reburied the coffin, and I set to work, constituting myself a detective for myself. After very careful and judicious ferreting, I finally learned from a former employee of the Athols that, a day previous to Ezra's flight, Alma had been smuggled out of the city in a drugged condition, and taken to some place in the West.

"Here my trail ended, but I set out to pick it up again. Just before starting I came into a fortune, which enabled me to travel. I went to Canada, but could find no trace. I visited every State in the Union, crossed the ocean, went to Australia, all on false leads, but all to no purpose.

"But now, at last, when my fortune is nearly

all absorbed, I have heard of a man in Camp 10, Arizona, whom I have reason to believe is Ezra Athol. He goes under the name of Buck Brennan, and is said to have a lovely daughter.

"So I am going there to find out, and if I am murdered, you who find this may come to the natural conclusion that my assassin was my old foe, Ezra Athol. I beg that you will avenge me, and tell Alma I died for her sake!

"(Signed) BARTLEY BREWSTER.
"*Obituary*, FLORIAN FLOOD."

This was the contents of the document Philo Fly had robbed Brennan of, and the boy's eyes glistened with pleasure as he finished his last perusal.

"It's plain enough Bucky Brennan is Ezra Athol," he commented, "for Red Ruthven started to call him 'Ez.' But the next question is, where is this Alma, and is Brewster really dead?

"I'll bet my boots an' go bare-footed that he ain't! and that this Beatrice is not Alma, if I know myself! In the first place, that interview with Bucko was too suggestive, an' after she went out he was askin' where he'd ever find another such a prize. Then, again, Red Ruthven said 'your daughter?' with an interrogation point in the speech, and laughed as sarcastically as a malaria mosquito in August.

"It strikes me that Beatrice is Bucko's better half or worse, as they're tryin' the confidence-love-and-so-forth business on this foreigner to get his boodle, same as they did on Hood of Denver.

"I wouldn't mind communicating with Mr. Hood, if he wasn't so far away. And you can bet I'll see the English snob, and sound him.

"Now, let me see: What else? Oh! Yes. Bucko interviewed Butch, and asked how matters were, and seemed very anxious. He made believe to inquire after two horses—the brown and the sorrel—but I closed my own one right eye, on that score. Bucko ain't the man as would feel very much worried over two young horses—not he! If I read matters right, what is more natural than that he referred to people shut up somewhere?

"I wasn't burned up in the shanty, but was in the neighborhood for several days afterward, and didn't see any signs of Brewster being buried. So, as Brewster must be sorrel, that accounts for one horse, I reckon. If so, mayn't Alma be the other? I should say she might. Next question: where are they secreted? That remains not only to be found out, but it remains for Phil Fly to find it out.

"Now, let me see:

"Where am I to begin first? There are several persons it is important I should have an interview with, namely—Bucko, Red Ruthven, Lord Derby, Beatrice, Butch McTiger, Black Margaret, Jehu Josh, perhaps, and last but not least, my little charmer, Jim. In all the cases but the latter, a steel persuader or two, carrying Number 32's, might be necessary to induce free speech and open confidence.

"I think his lordship might be induced to speak without any expense for powder, and the others could be forced to talk some, except it be his royal redness, Mr. Ruthven, who, it strikes me forcibly would chaw lead and spit it out before he'd tell any thing he didn't want to. He talks like that sort of a hairpin, anyhow.

"As for the robbery of the bank, in San Diego, the officer with the requisition will be here, in a few days and then we'll gobble onto Bucko, and make him think his name is Dennis.

"It seems that I've at last got onto the mystery, or part of it, about Claim 10. Beautiful Beatrice is finishing a plate. It can't be a dinner plate, for I haven't seen a solitary crockery foundry in the town; and it can't be a coffin plate, for I judge they plant 'em here without even so much as a box. So what else can it be but a counterfeiting plate.

"Philo Fly of Phenix, there's work ahead for you to wrestle with, and it behooves you to compose your anatomy for the trial of endurance!"

And with this conclusion, the young detective began to make preparations for a good night's rest.

There was indeed work ahead, for him!

CHAPTER X.

MR. JONES, OF YUCCA.

THE next day, Deadwood Dick, Junior, otherwise Phil Fly of Phenix, arose from a refreshing slumber, feeling in good spirits, and well prepared to cope with the dangerous work before him.

After making his ablutions, he hastily cooked himself a repast of wild game, and partook of it with a relish.

He then set about disguising himself, preparatory to visiting Claim 10.

Since the fire at Randal's shanty, the detective had not been idle, for he had brought to the mountain cave a couple of disguises, so as to be ready for a change of appearance, at short notice.

He now set to work, and in a short space of time, had transformed himself into a sedate and rather attractive-looking gentleman, in the prime of life, with a fine flowing beard, and neat attire.

He had a well developed, commanding figure, and so it was easy to "make up" to good advantage, and when he was made up, no one would have suspected that he was Philo Fly.

When all was in readiness, and he was well armed, he set out for Claim 10, and arrived there in the middle of the forenoon.

The camp presented a somewhat less dangerous appearance, than at nightfall, when lurking danger seemed to pervade the very atmosphere.

But few persons were to be seen about the camp, when Phil arrived, and a dozen or more ruffians were lounging outside of Black Mag's Roaring Bull Hotel.

The other male denizens of the camp were probably working in the shaft.

Phil made bold to saunter about through the place for some minutes, before venturing to accost any one, and was conscious of being covertly watched by more than one pair of eyes—watched with curiosity, if not with actual enmity.

Finally he approached the gang in front of the Roaring Bull, and addressed Butch McTiger, who was perhaps the most conspicuous of the lot.

"I am looking, sir, for a Mr. Buck Brennan, owner of the mining interests of this camp!" Phil said. "Can you direct me to where I will find him?"

"What do you want of him?" Butch demanded, suspiciously.

"I don't know that that's any of your business, sir!" Phil replied, promptly. "I simply asked you a gentlemanly question and expected a like answer."

"Waal, didn't you get it?" McTiger demanded, savagely.

"I did not. You asked me a question, instead of giving me an answer, as you should have done!"

"Ye'r a durned cussed liar, an' I'll leave it to ther boys. Hey, chums, didn't I give ther chap a gentlemanly answer?"

"On course ye did!" assented his companions, in a chorus.

"Thar, now!" growled Butch—"that shows ye. Ye tried ter make me out no gentleman, did ye, ye cussed Easterner? I've a mind to get down off from this ere stoop, and crack yer jaws fer ye!"

"You'd best not try it!" Phil retorted.

"Oh! hadn't I? Then, by thunder, I'll do it just fer fun, and take some o' the starch out o' ye, 'thout half trying. I'm a terror, I am, with hair on me teeth?"

And with a sort of anger, intended to intimidate Phil, he leaped off the piazza, with his huge fists doubled up and his eyes glaring.

"But Phil did not scare worth a cent.

He awaited the onslaught with perfect composure, not even assuming a defensive attitude at first.

But, as Butch came rushing upon him, like an infuriated bull, his right fist suddenly struck out, and hit the ruffian between the eyes.

The blow though delivered with no apparent force, as a spectator would view it, was hard enough to take McTiger "off his pins," and land him on his back.

It was several seconds ere he attempted to arise, and when he did he held one hand upon his nose, from which the claret flowed copiously, and groaned out:

"Thunder! but that was a soaker!"

He then climbed up on the piazza, and entered the Roaring Bull, followed by his pals.

The rampant McTiger was, for the time being, undoubtedly conquered.

Phil smiled quietly, and was about turning away, when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he was wheeled abruptly around, facing—Buck Brennan!

"Well, sir, who are you, and what is the meaning of this disgraceful street brawl I saw, while approaching?" the mine-owner demanded, eying Phil suspiciously.

"My name is Jones of Yucca!" Phil replied, coolly. "I made an inquiry of a rough on the piazza as to where I could find a gentleman, whereupon he attempted an assault upon me. I fancy he got the worst of it, however, as one blow appeared to satisfy him!"

"What gentleman of this camp did you inquire for?" Brennan demanded.

"On Brennan, a mine-owner."

"Well, sir, I am that individual. What do you want of me?"

"Ah! Glad to meet you," and Phil put out his hand. "I received a dispatch from a friend in Frisco that there was a mine advertised for sale here on advantageous terms, and so I hastened here from Yucca so as to be among the earliest on the ground."

"Ah! Just so. Come along with me, Mr. Jones," Brennan said, evidently not a little pleased. "Yes, I have a mine for sale, and advertised the fact in a San Francisco paper. But, to tell the truth, I hardly expected an answer so quick. Advertising is a great thing, eh, Mr. Jones?"

"A man who is too close-fisted to advertise does not deserve to succeed!" Phil smilingly replied. "What do you value your mine at, Mr. Brennan?"

"Well, you will have to look over the premises and form something of an idea of its worth before I would feel like naming my price. You see, the mine cannot be bought separate from Claim 10. He who buys the mine also buys the entire claim, with all its buildings, implements, machinery, etc., as well as its yet undeveloped mineral resources."

"So I presumed. How long has the mine been worked, sir?"

"Three years."

"About what has been the yield?"

"Well, you can form a modest idea, when I tell you that when I arrived here I had but ten dollars to my name. Since then I have opened the mine, built all the habitations, put in all the machinery, paid my help, and cleared two hundred thousand dollars!"

"Gulliver knocked out in one round; Munchausen double discounted!" thought Phil, but of course did not dare say so, aloud.

"That is great prosperity, I should say, Mr. Brennan. I had no idea the mine was anywhere near so productive. And as your valuation upon it must be correspondingly large, I presume it is not worth while for us to talk business, as I am financially unable to shoulder such a hefty affair."

"Don't be hasty. I have made enough to keep me well, as long as I live, and for this simple reason I am willing to let the mine go at a great sacrifice on its real valuation. Do you propose to pay down cash, when you purchase, sir?"

"I do."

"Are you prepared to do so, now?"

"Certainly not. I'd be a fool to carry around large sums of money, in such a country as this. I should, after drawing up contracts, have to go to Prescott, and draw the money from the bank."

Brennan looked rather disappointed at this, Phil noticed. The wily villain evidently had expected that Mr. Jones had brought a fat bundle with him.

"Well, that will do, if we can make a bargain," Brennan finally said. "Do you wish to visit the mine?"

"I must, of course, look over the entire property, carefully, as preliminary to purchasing," Phil replied.

So they went to the mouth of the shaft, and were lowered down many feet, finally reaching the drifts where the miners were at work.

Brennan took great pains to explain everything that was worth explaining, and many things that were not.

Mr. Jones was next invited to visit the mine-owner's house, and examine it, and also have a glass of good whisky.

He was eager to accept the first offer, but not so sure about the second. The whisky might be drugged!

Wide-awake, now, as ever, the young detective was aware that Brennan was constantly regarding him, inquiringly.

Did he suspect the disguise?

Phil could not tell.

He was rather inclined to think that the mine-owner was "sizing him up," and trying to get out how much money he really was worth.

If this was the case Phil felt quite reconciled.

They went to the Brennan house, and Phil was ushered into the parlor.

The Englishman chanced to be seated there, at the time, and Phil was introduced to him as Mr. Jones, of Yucca.

His lordship didn't appear to be much impressed with the name of Jones, and made only a very cold acknowledgment of the introduction.

Mr. Brennan then excused himself, for a few

minutes, and left the room; when Phil, leaning over toward the Englishman, said, in a distinct whisper:

"You are in deadly peril, here! Meet me a mile up the gulch, two hours hence, and I will explain all. I am a detective!"

His lordship gazed at Phil searchingly, a moment, then nodded his head that he understood, and resumed reading his paper.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD DUDLEY'S STORY.

BUCK BRENNAN soon returned, carrying a salver, containing a decanter and glasses, and deposited it on the table.

"Help yourself, Mr. Jones and Lord Dudley," he said, graciously. "You'll find it better stuff than is generally found in these out-of-the-way Western towns. I had it sent here for my own use, you see."

Phil didn't see, for any certainty.

Lord Dudley helped himself freely to the liquor, but the young spy touched it lightly, himself.

Then, Brennan showed him through the house, even to the cellar, but Phil failed to discover the first evidence that either Brewster or Alma Athol were prisoners, thereabouts.

He was introduced to Beatrice, but did not seek to become particularly acquainted with her.

Shortly afterward, he and Brennan left the house, and made a tour of the camp, even to visiting Black Mag's and taking a drink; but Brennan objected to showing Phil through this latter place, saying the landlady did not have an idea that the property might change hands, and he did not care to apprise her until an actual sale took place.

When once more out of doors, Brennan said:

"Now then, if you want to talk business, I am ready. You have gone over the property pretty thoroughly, and ought to be able to estimate its value, pretty accurately."

"Well, what is your very lowest price. I am a man of few words, in making a bargain. I never banter. If a price don't suit me, that's all there is of it!"

Brennan did not know what to say.

He evidently did not understand his man.

"Well, as I said before, I'm willing to make a big sacrifice for ready cash. I'll take a hundred thousand!" the mine-owner offered.

"Too much for my pile!" Phil said, buttoning up his coat. "Too much entirely."

"Why, nonsense! The mine is worth two hundred thousand, if a cent."

"Can't help that, sir. It may be worth a million, but my pile wouldn't buy it."

"How much have you got?"

"That is a question I don't choose to answer."

"I don't believe you want to buy the mine at all!" Buck declared, suspiciously.

"Not at your figures, you can wager!" Phil retorted, rather sharply.

"Well, will you give eighty?"

"No."

"Seventy?"

"No."

"Twenty-five?" There was now a peculiar savage gleam entering Brennan's eyes—a gleam that betokened increasing distrust.

Phil stroked his flowing beard, looking thoughtful.

"Twenty-five, eh?" he said, slowly.

"Yes, twenty-five, cash, and not a cent lower."

"Well, that's a little more reasonable. Still, I am not sure but what it's too much. I should have to deliberate a little. How long will you give me to decide in?"

"How long do you want?"

"Two hours."

"Very well, I'll grant that time, knowing well that you will come to the conclusion you are getting a bargain."

"Then, I will take a walk up the trail, and return to your house with my answer at the appointed hour. If I conclude to take the mine, I will start to-night for Prescott for the money."

And so saying, Philo walked away.

He was aware that Brennan remained standing in the street, where the interview took place, and watched him depart, until he rounded the bend in the gulch, and was out of sight.

Mr. Jones, of Yucca, did not hurry, but moved off at a leisurely and thoughtful gait.

His great wonder, though, was that an attempt was not made to shoot him in the back, and was heartily glad when he was out of sight, around the bend.

"If Brennan had any suspicion of my bogus biz, why did he let me escape?" was the conundrum that occurred to Phil. "On the whole, I

think the prospect of my taking the mine at twenty five thousand rather allayed suspicion. He evidently wants to get rid of the mine and skip at the earliest possible moment. I'll have a word to say about your skipping, my dear Bucko. As for your mine, and Claim 10, I wouldn't give you twenty-five cents for it."

After rounding the turn in the gulch, Philo hurried on at a stiff gait, for he had seen Lord Dudley leave the town while he was talking with Brennan.

Sure enough, a mile from Claim 10, he found the young Englishman awaiting him.

A tall, willowy fellow was this Dudley—perhaps a trifle slender of build, yet not at all gawky. His face was smooth and rather sallow, yet not homely, his eyes blue, his hair very light colored.

He dressed elegantly, and the jewelry he wore was of a decidedly imposing character.

"I was just about returning to the camp!" he said, as Philo came up. "I did not think you were coming."

"I came as soon as I could get away from Buck Brennan!" Philo assured. "Let's sit down here while we converse."

They became seated, as Lord Dudley remarked:

"I shall be very much pleased to know what you want of me."

"One thing, I want to prevent you from making a bloomin' ass of yourself. Excuse my plainness of speech, but, that's my way. Now, see here: Your name is Lord Derby Dudley, of England, as I understand it?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. Now, Dud, old boy, I'm a detective, but I've got nothing against you, and don't expect to have, for I can see by your eye that you are *white*. I do propose, however, to save you from a snare set to ruin you; and as a reward for doing so, will you answer me a few questions? You can trust me with implicit confidence!"

"Well, what do you want to know?" Dudley demanded, scrutinizing the detective sharply, and suspiciously.

"First, what brought you over from England, and most especially here to Claim 10?"

"I came over from England in the interest of an old estate adjoining mine, and of which I am executor. I come in search of two heirs, who fled to this country some twelve years ago."

"Ah! I am interested. Go on."

Dudley smiled.

"Well," he resumed, "in order for you to get any clear idea of the matter, I should have to tell you nearly all of the story!"

"Stave ahead, then! Nothing would please me better than to hear the narrative, and, being a detective, it might be possible I could help you to straighten out the kinks, if there are any."

"Would you, if you could?"

"Bet your money on it, every time!"

"Well, I'll tell you briefly: Twelve years ago a crusty old bachelor lived adjoining my uncle's estate—which is now mine—whose name was Sir Roger Lonsvale, and he had in his custody two twin nieces, Maude and Barbara Lonsvale.

"These girls, just budding into early womanhood, were very wild, and, it seems, gave their uncle much trouble."

"Did you ever see them?"

"No. I lived some miles away, then, and was but ten years of age. Well, finally, the girls grew to be so reckless and harum-scarum that Sir Roger had to set his foot down, and became a most severe taskmaster.

"The girls rebelled, and, taking what little money they could get hold of fled to America. Almost immediately afterward Sir Roger was stricken down with paralysis, and being the only one interested in what became of the girls, nothing was done to recover them, until a year ago, when he died, leaving them or their heirs, his fortune, and making me his executor, agent to attempt to find the missing twins."

"Well, I set out on what you must recognize as a mission not only of importance, but equally one of most uncertain results."

"I went direct to New York, where the girls were supposed to have landed, and there began my search. After three months of weary work—persevering and unrelenting work, I was rewarded by a clew, which I followed up, inch by inch, literally, until I found out this much:

"On reaching New York, the two runaways failing to find proper work, went to Harry Hill's beerium, in which they served first in the capacity of waiter girls. Later, their vocal abilities gave them a place on the stage, where they remained for some time."

"It was at Hill's that Maud met with a rich

New York widower, who became enamored of her, and married her under the promise that, as long as he supported her in comfort, she would never make known the marriage. A promise she kept, so far as I can learn. Finally her husband went West, and while there, sent for her to join him, which she did, taking with her a little child which she had adopted.

"Not long after, the husband returned to New York, but his wife and foster-child—never! The husband explained that they had perished in a blizzard, somewhere in Kansas, he alone, of the three, escaping.

"Well, as near as I can learn, he began to make marriage overtures to the other sister, and some two or three years ago he broke up in business—failed for a fortune, and both he and Barbara disappeared!"

"This man's name?" Philo cried, eagerly.

"Was Ezra Atholl!"

CHAPTER XII.

JIM'S WELCOME.

MOST detectives, young or old, who had dropped upon a discovery like that which Philo Fly of Phenix had made, would have given token of their surprise.

Philo, however, did nothing of the sort. He was silent until satisfied that he had mastered the excitement that raged within his bosom.

He was conscious, however, that Lord Dudley was watching him inquiringly.

"It strikes me you have heard that name before," Dudley said.

"Does it?" replied Philo. "Maybe I have, and maybe I haven't. On the whole, I am pretty sure I never heard the name before you mentioned it. But, go on with your story."

Philo had emphasized heard, a little, but Dudley evidently did not notice the fact.

"I haven't much more to relate," he answered. "I came West, and have spent half a year in searching, but all in vain. I finally brought up in this camp—"

"Was introduced to Miss Beatrice Brennan, and have stayed here ever since!" finished Philo, with a quizzical smile that appeared to irritate his lordship, for he quickly responded:

"Well, yes, but that's peculiarly my own business!"

"Peculiarly your own business, it is!" repeated Philo. "Can't say as I blame you. The young lady is decidedly a most charming creature."

"Do you think so?"

"To be sure. What an ornament she'd make to the home of a rich man, like you! She's graceful, accomplished, and beautiful. What more do you want?"

"By Jove you are right!" Dudley cried, enthusiastically. "She's a creature most divine."

"Correct!" And I suppose you will marry her?" Philo asked, with sober face, but inwardly nearly bursting with laughter.

"I haven't said that yet, sir. I—I—"

"You haven't got the puckering string of your courage drawn tight enough to pop, yet, eh?"

"Well, if you want it that way, have it so."

"Well, you needn't spend any sleepless nights over the matter. She'll have you, fast enough."

"Eh? How's that?"

"I say she'll have you. In fact, sir, she's bound to have you!"

"I don't understand. Pray explain what you mean!"

"Well, the matter is just this. Having found out who you are, Buck Brennan and Beatrice have set about to get you into a hole. This is how they propose to do it: Beatrice is to play the lover to you, and draw you on all she can until she gets you to propose. Then, she's going to tell you that if you want her, you must give her a draft on the bank of London for a big amount, besides which she will bleed you of all your loose cash, to buy her wedding trousseau with, and—"

"Stop! stop!" Dudley cried, angrily, leaping his feet. "I will not hear any more—"

"Sit down on that rock and sit there until I get through, or I'll knock you down!" sternly Philo cried, also arising.

Dudley sat down again.

Philo then went on:

"When they have worked what they can out of you, you will mysteriously disappear, the same as many another good man has done!"

"Nonsense, nonsense! You cannot make me believe anything of the sort."

"Can't, eh? Now, maybe I can. Perhaps I can make you believe it when I tell you that Buck Brennan is a villain, a thief, and a murderer, and that the gallows awaits him; perhaps you will believe me when I tell you that Beatrice is a forger of checks, and a counterfeiter, and

that one of the important secrets of Claim 10, is that the gang who hang out at Black Mag's are not only thieves but murderers, and that Buck Brennan is secretly their chief, leaving it for Black Mag to stand the brunt of the blame for all the crime that occurs in the den."

"No, sir, I will not believe that. My opinion is that you are a blackmailer!"

"Blackmailer be jiggered! What object could I have in blackmailing any one? There's no money in it—not in this case, at least. I tell you, Dudley, I am giving you the truth in the matter, and it's for your own benefit. If you don't choose to believe it, that's none of my lookout. Another thing I can tell you, as a solid fact!"

"What is it?"

"That you cannot have Beatrice, at any price!"

"Bah!"

"It's a fact!"

"How do you make it out?"

"Because she's already Buck Brennan's wife!"

"That's enough!" thundered a deep voice, hoarse with passion. "Stir an inch, at the peril of your lives!"

The sound of the threatening voice, as well as the words, caused both Philo and Dudley a violent start, and despite the injunction that they should not stir an inch, they did stir, by looking around.

Just behind, and a trifle above them, standing on a rock, was no less a personage than Buck Brennan himself!

He was the picture of rage incarnate, and in either hand he grasped a revolver, the muzzles of which were leveled at the parties who had been surprised.

"Ho, ho!" he roared, "but I have the bulge on ye now, me fine pair of ducks! A pretty little interview you've been havin', at my expense. But, I'll show ye that the man who gets ahead of Buck Brennan has to get up in the morning before the first worm crawls! Move to defend yourselves and I'll fill your carcasses so full o' bullets that you'll weigh dead weight!"

With this admonition, the mine-owner descended from the rock, and came around so as to confront his prisoners.

"So you aire a detective, Mr. Jones, and chock-full of lies about folks, the same as the rest o' yer kit!" he snarled, as he glared at Phil savagely.

"If you overheard our conversation, I presume there is no need of asking that question!" Philo retorted, watching his enemy narrowly, for a chance to draw his own weapons.

"On course thar ain't. I overheard every word that passed between you two, and I see a conspiracy is on foot to ruin the fair reputation of myself and daughter. But, ye can't come any such game over Buck Brennan—not much!"

"In precisely ten minutes, by my watch, I shall blow the heads off the both of you."

"For heaven's sake, don't harm me!" cried Lord Dudley, apparently much alarmed. "I hadn't anything to do with this man's accusations, and if you were a listener you will know I did not give credence to them."

"Then, you don't believe the charges he made, against me and my daughter?"

"Not a word, sir—not a word! I believe, as I told him, that he is a blackmailer!"

"Very well, then; I'll let you off, but not so with him, the lying scoundrel!"

"I haven't uttered a lie!" Phil retorted.

"You know what I said *was* the truth. More than that, Buck Brennan, as you choose to call yourself, you have another name, which, were I to mention it, would cause much surprise to certain people!"

"Bah! your lies no one would believe! Take off that false beard. I want to see if my suspicions are correct!"

"With the greatest of pleasure!" Phil replied knowing it would be useless for him to resist, and he suited action to the word. "Philo Fly of Phenix, at your service, dear Bucko!"

"Curse you!" the mine-owner gritted. "I suspected you were not dead, although my daughter tried to persuade me to the contrary!"

"Your daughter! just as sure as there's electricity in the fur on a cat's back, that sure am I that Beatrice is Mrs. Bucko Brennan!"

The mine-owner uttering a fierce "curse you!" took deliberate aim at Phil's breast, but did not fire!

There was a sharp rifle report, and a bullet shattered the villain's wrist, the weapon falling to the ground while a clear voice called out:

"Drop that other shooter, Buck Brennan, or ye'r a dead man!"

Brennan threw down his left-hand revolver, with a bitter curse.

"Ye needn't swear, Buck," cried the musical voice again, "for I wouldn't 'a' peppered you if you hadn't been goin' to salivate the Fly. You're a pretty villain, ain't you tho'?"

And Jim, the Girl Miner, came tripping in upon the scene, holding a repeating-rifle in her grasp, ready for instant use.

"You can just shuffle right away to Claim 10, Buck," she continued, "or I'll finish the job I begun. You know I'm wildcats an' cattymounts, when my mad's up, an' it's up now, higher'n a kite. So *git!* Hump yourself! An' you too, Englisher! You're a skim-milk calf, *you* are, and I don't want you never to speak to me ag'in. Git, both of ye, or I'll shoot!"

And, they "got!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW PARDS.

BRENNAN and Lord Dudley, lost no time in hurrying away down the gulch toward Claim 10, Brennan bandaging his shattered wrist as he went.

As for Jim, she watched them, until they rounded the bend, her pose graceful and defensive as she stood with rifle held ready for instant use; and Philo Fly of Phenix thought he had never seen a prettier picture, for the little maiden's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes glowed with spirit and excitement.

When she looked around, after the departing couple had rounded the bend, Phil was standing beside her and gazing down into her face, admiringly.

"You are a little heroine!" he said, laying one hand on her shoulder, "and I have you to thank again for coming to my rescue. How shall I ever repay you?"

"I don't want any pay, and if you don't stop calling me little, I won't like you!"

"All right! I had forgotten all about that. After this, I'll call you Big Jim. Now, won't that sound nice and romantic?"

And Phil laughed heartily at the idea.

Jim was forced to laugh, too.

"You're awful provoking," she said, pouting her cherry red lips. "I neither want to be Big Jim nor Little Jim, but just plain Jim."

"All right. Now, Jim, I want you to tell me how you happened along so opportunely. It seems to me I'm always lucky in being helped out of bad scrapes. I take after the original Deadwood Dick on that score."

"It's a good thing to be lucky," Jim declared. "You want to know how I came to be in the vicinity? Well, I'll tell you. I see'd a gentleman talking with Buck Brennan, but I had no idea it was you, for I thought you had gone up the flume. Well, I see'd the stranger leave the camp, an' I saw Buck Brennan sneak after him, and I s'pected devilry, and so I took a sneak after Buck. There you have it, all done up in a prize package!"

"Exactly! And again I repeat that you are a brave lit—I mean, a brave young lady, and you have my most sincere gratitude for what you have done for me. But, are you not aware that it will be dangerous for you to return to Claim 10?"

"I don't intend to go back there. I've had my gold changed into greenbackers, an' I'm goin' to pull stakes fer some other point after awhile."

"Ah! after a while?"

"Yes. For the present I'm going to hang 'round these points, an' see the fun when you scoop in Buck Brennan. I want to go and poke him in the ribs, when he's bound so he can't hurt me!"

"Well, I opine that it won't be long before you will have that opportunity," Phil answered, smiling. "I'm ready to clap the bracelets on him as soon as assistance arrives!"

"So I should judge, by what I overheard you tell that chap Dudley. And is it so, that they're tryin' to rope the Englisher in, and that Beatrice is Buck's wife?"

"You can bet high on it. There's more developments to come out besides as soon's my plans are arranged, and I shall have to work pretty cute to fetch everything around. But, I guess I'm equal to it!"

"If I can be of any assistance to you, you kin count me in!" Jim said, eagerly. "I like adventure as well as the next one, and it takes a lot to scare me."

"No doubt you could be of immense service to me, in one way and another, Jim, but I could not think of running you into any danger, for, should any ill befall you, I could never forgive myself."

"Oh! don't fret about *that*. I kinder like you and I'd like to help you break up the devil-

try that's been going on in Claim 10. Golly! wouldn't I like to see that stuck-up Beatrice git handcuffed, and marched off to jail? I'd jest hoot, with joy!"

"You will have a chance to hoot, if things work right. As for your parding with me, Jim, you must use your own judgment about that, and remember that I have not sought to influence you to do so. You may get hurt, and then you'll wish you had not run the risk."

"Not a bit. When I do a thing, and it kicks on me, I never kick at myself because I got left. I'll look out for Jim."

"Very well; suit yourself. I am now going to my retreat, and you can accompany me, if you like. Perhaps your friend, Red Ruthven won't like your parding with me?"

"Oh! he won't care. Besides, it's none of his business, anyhow. I know how to take care of

They started off up the gulch, en route for Philo's mountain retreat.

Jim, now clad in shoes and stockings and a clean dress of pretty pattern, with her wealth of hair flowing in waves down her back, made a picture that Phil loved to feast his eyes upon.

They chatted pleasantly as they walked along, Jim doing her full share of the conversation.

Suddenly, to her great surprise and consternation, she made the discovery that Phil was not walking by her side.

She paused and gazed about her in all directions, but he was nowhere to be seen!

What could have become of him?

At the time of his disappearance they had been passing along where a dense thicket bordered one side of the trail.

Phil was listening to his companion, who was venting her opinion of Lord Dudley, to whom she had taken a sudden dislike, when he felt his arm seized in a vise-like grasp, and he was hauled quickly into the thicket, to find himself in the presence of Red Ruthven, in whose eyes, as they looked through the holes in his mask, there was a stern gleam.

"Young man!" he hissed, without relinquishing his grip, "what are your intentions toward that girl?"

"Most honorable, I assure you!" Phil replied, looking him straight in the eye. "I am proud to say I never took an unfair advantage of any girl's confidence yet!"

"It is well. If I thought you would harm her I'd cut your heart out!"

"You need have no fear. She is going with me of her own free will."

"Very well. Go! Here, take this!"

He handed Phil a large, plump rabbit, that had only recently been killed.

Phil took the cue at once—also the rabbit—and left the ticket.

He found Jim looking around for him in every direction greatly surprised.

"Oh! my! how your disappearance scared me!" she cried. "What a nice rabbit!"

"Ain't it a daisy, though?" Phil replied. "Do you know how to roast it?"

"Well I guess so. I've roasted more than one of them. We'll have it for dinner, eh? That will seem just like we was married and gone to keeping house, won't it?"

"Very much so!" Phil replied, rather absent-mindedly, at the same time wondering if there were any likelihood that he would ever marry again.

His thoughts went back to California Kit, lying cold and silent 'neath the sod, and he was of the opinion not.

In due time they reached the mountain cave, where Phil soon built a good fire which brightened it up wonderfully.

Then, while Jim made preparations for roasting the rabbit, Philo sat down to lay out his plans and get Jim's views.

He narrated the circumstances of his first meeting with Bartley Brewster, and the subsequent finding of the document, and all about its contents.

Jim listened, intently.

"Now don't it look as if both Florian Flood and Alma Athol were neither of them dead, but, instead, are held prisoners in Claim 10?"

"Maybe so. But where would they be?"

"That's for us to find out. I am positive they are alive, and it must be our business to find and liberate them."

"They may be shut up in Black Mag's?"

"That's what I think. Is there a cellar under the den?"

"I think so. Once when I was there I noticed a trap door in the floor."

"You never noticed any outside way of getting into the cellar, if one exists?"

"No."

"How comes it you are not allowed in the place any more?"

"Oh! I got snoopin' around too much, an' tryin' to see what I could find out. Then Mag soured on me, and give me the G. B!"

"I'd like to get an interview with this Black Mag outside of the den!" Philo said, thoughtfully.

At which Jim laughed.

"You can keep right on liking," she said.

"Why so?"

"Because it's said in the camp that she has not been seen outside the place since it was built."

"That's singular, by George! The more I think I'm getting on to the mystery the more I get tangled up. To-night we will go to the camp. It's going to be darker than coal tar, and we can skulk about without trouble. I have a suit of youth's attire that will just about fit you, if you've no objections to wearing it, and can disguise you so that no one will recognize you should they meet you face to face."

"I'll wear 'em. I'll smoke, chaw terbaccer, an' swear, an' do most anything so's I play up boy all right!" Jim replied, with a laugh.

CHAPTER XIV.

RED RUTHVEN'S MANIFESTO, AND A WRATHFUL WOMAN.

IN Camp 10, the forenoon merged into afternoon, and the semi-tropical sun of Southern Arizona sent down more warmth to Mother Earth than it had done for many a day.

The camp, literally, was in repose.

The miners were at work far below the surface; the roughs and toughs of Black Mag's den sought the shade upon the hotel piazza.

Not a person was to be seen in locomotion about the camp, and everywhere was the Sabbath-like appearance of a pious Eastern village.

Until a man came running up to the piazza, in breathless haste, and shouted:

"Hi! boys; hi! b'ys—wake up an' come along! I've got suthin' to show ye, what concerns you all!"

It was the signal for the clearing of the piazza and the crowd of roughs followed close at the heels of their fellow tough.

He led them to a cabin at the extreme lower end of the camp, which was tenantless.

The door had been torn from its hinges, and taken close to where the incoming and outgoing stages passed, and there was propped up with poles, to a standing position.

The side of the door facing the trail, had been pasted over with white paper, and the following message lettered upon it, neatly, with black ink:

"WARNING!!

"Notice is again given to all strangers coming this way, not to stop at Claim 10, as if they do so,

THEY DO IT AT THE PERIL OF THEIR LIVES!

The camp is infested by a gang of

THIEVES AND MURDERERS!

Their headquarters are at

BLACK MAG'S ROARING BULL HOTEL!

So take timely warning and beware!

NOTICE NO. 2.

"The before-mentioned thieves and murderers, 35 in number, are hereby warned to pack up their traps and get out of the camp of Claim 10, or they will be ruthlessly killed off, one by one, in rapid succession. Those who value their lives take heed. Those who don't, will not be given any further notice, but will pass in their checks, one after another, until not one of the scoundrels remain, to sully the reputation of the town."

"Black Mag and Buck Brennan are exempt from this list of thirty-five. They need not try to escape as they will be shot down if they do!"

"Signed, RED RUTHVEN."

This was the startling manifesto that stared in the faces of the ruffianly gang from the Roaring Bull Hotel.

Some of the party couldn't read, but to those who couldn't the notice was read aloud.

For a few moments the atmosphere around that billboard was burdened with curses and execrations.

Many of the gang had never seen Red Ruthven, but that mattered not.

He had a local reputation for being a desperate man, and was feared by both the good and bad of the camp.

He had heretofore issued several edicts to the citizens of the camp, with the warning that if his orders were disobeyed, the offender would be found "on his back with his toes turned up to the moon!"

And when a case of disobedience had occasionally occurred, the offender had invariably been found dead.

Thus it was that when the name of Red Ruthven was seen, or uttered, there was at once inspired a feeling of dread.

And this rough gang, who made Black Mag's their rendezvous, knew that this manifesto "meant business," in the strictest sense of the word.

They realized it, from the fact that they had never before been ordered to "git up and git."

In the mean time, while the gang were surrounding the bill-board, and discussing the situation, another scene was occurring in an up-stairs room of the hotel.

Two persons were seated facing each other at a table.

One was Butch McTiger, with a strip of court-plaster on his nose, and one eye swollen shut.

The other was Black Mag.

She was dressed and masked the same as usual. Her bead-like eyes gleamed through the holes in her mask, brilliantly.

Judging by her nervous movements, she was considerably excited.

"I don't believe it!" she said, stamping her foot on the floor.

"Ye kin do as ye please about that!" Butch declared, gruffly. "I jest give et to yer fer a straight pointer!"

Black Mag smote the table with her fist.

"If I thought this were true, I'd kill them both!" she cried, passionately. "I came here to seek an eventual revenge, but was not prepared for this. Where is Ruskin?"

"In Sacramento, I s'pose?"

"And has made returns?"

"Reckon so. The boss got a box from there last night on the stage. I kerried it to the house, and the boss seemed glad to get it, and handed me a fiver to keep mum."

"The wretch! And you say a man came to buy the mine to-day?"

"Yes."

"What became of him?"

"Tuk a walk up the gulch. After a bit, Buck follered him."

"Went out of the camp to complete their bargain, I suppose!" Black Mag said, grating her teeth—a peculiar habit she had when excited.

"I'm much obliged to you for this news, Butch, and will pay you well for it. But, Ezra Athol shall find he is playing treachery with the wrong person. Ha! how I hate the wretch!"

"Do you think they intend to fly at once?"

"No, unless across the border. They want to get their hands on all the boodle they can before they skip."

"How are they making out with the dude?"

Butch made a wry face.

"I don't know," he said. "Things don't seem to move very fast. I got kinder of an idee ther Englisher knows more than they give him credit for."

"No doubt. Beatrice is a fool. Because she succeeded once, she hadn't ought to think she can do it twice."

"Have you ever heard what brought Dudley to America?"

"No!"

"Do you think they know?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard Buck Brennan express a desire to know who I am?"

"No!"

Black Mag sat, then, for several minutes, apparently in deep meditation.

Suddenly, she looked hard at Butch, with those small bead-like eyes of hers.

"Butch," she said, impressively, "things ain't going right, and I want to know if I can trust you?—if you can keep your mouth shut, from the rest of the gang?"

"You kin, I sw'ar to et."

"Well, there's danger ahead, Butch!"

"I know it."

"If there wasn't Buck would not skin, He's too fond of money."

"Right, ag'in."

"There are detectives on the scene, was one of 'em to day, perhaps."

"Mebbe you're right."

"I'm sure Buck wants to get out, us in the lurch. That's plain. Now, me: I came here, to Claim 10, for a purpose, purpose was to obtain vengeance."

"I met this man Brennan; he talked with me, and drew out of me that my scruples of honesty were not of finest silk, and offered me the job of superintendent of the biz. That was some before you came."

"Well, I saw a chance to make a spec, and concluded to forego my vengeance for a while."

So I took charge of things, and you'll acknowledge that I've ruled right well!"

"Nary a man c'd hev done better!" complimented McTiger, wiping his mouth, and wishing he had a "geyser."

"Well, you see what the result is. You see what good my faithfulness has done. They propose to sneak off, take everything they can with them, and leave us in the lurch."

"Et looks like et, Mag, cuss my boots ef et don't!"

"Butch, there is one whom I trusted implicitly!"

"Beatrice?"

"Yes. But, she is proving false, too. Butch, there is going to be a break-up, and you and I are alone in the secret, except them?"

"Guess we are, Mag!"

"Then, let's not be left in the lurch. Let's take all we can, and fly before the crash comes!"

"There won't be much left to fly on, will there?" Butch demanded, dubiously.

"Don't fear that, I have money. Besides, there's murder in my heart, and Brennan and Beatrice pay the penalty of their faithlessness in the dead hours of to-night. Here!"—she hastily dashed off a note, on a piece of paper. "Give that to Beatrice, and take care they don't slide out on the sly. This night's doings shall make Claim 10 notorious!"

CHAPTER XV.

MCTIGER "CAVES."

NIGHT drew on apace, and its mantle settled over the camp of Claim 10, like a funeral pall.

By this time the news of Red Ruthven's warning had spread to every person in the place, and two-thirds of those who had been *habitués* of the Roaring Bull Hotel had packed up their traps and vamoosed.

The other third were congregated within the hotel—grim, defiant men, who, it would seem by their savage aspects, feared neither God, man or devil.

They had banded together, and sworn that they could not be scared from the camp by all the Red Ruthvens in the universe.

They were armed to the teeth, and a more desperate looking set than one would care to see a photograph of, much less encounter.

Black Mag presided behind her bar, but it was plain to see that she was restless and uneasy, and when her bartender came in, she willingly relinquished the bar to his custody.

McTiger came in, after a while, and with a yawn, gave a glance at the clock, and went upstairs.

Some five minutes later, Black Mag followed his example, and found him in the same room, where they had held the previous interview.

"Well, what's the news?" she demanded, breathlessly.

McTiger lit his grimy clay pipe, before he made any reply; then he said:

"Plenty o' news, but none you'll appreciate very much, nor any one else when they know it."

"Go on! don't keep me in suspense!"

"You'll be lucky ef ye don't git suspended by the neck," was the grim reply.

"Go on! go on!"

"Well, when I left the hotel I went to the house o' me master"—with a wink and a grin—"and I found him pacin' the floor, an' lookin' as black as me hat. He didn't say anything, an' yer can bet I was mighty glad he didn't. Then, I hunted up Beatrice, and guv her yer note, and she glanced at it, nodded, and threw it in the fire."

"She will probably meet me, then," Black Mag said, absently. "Did you see any signs to cause you to think that they are going to try to get out, to-night?"

"No. I looked fer thet, but all seemed jest as usual, 'cept the boss 'peared sorter flurried!"

"How about Beatrice?"

"She 'peared all right. She was settin' 'long—his 'ere, the dude, a-huggin' up to him like et was 'er own brother's night, an' she wer' tryin' to keep 'er head through."

"Well! She'll never catch I in in her net!"

"Don't 'bout that!" McTiger said, grimly. "I seen a paper in her hand that looked like a 'Wanted'."

"That's all! Can it be she has entrapped him, after all? The more fool he! It will never do her any good, the hussy! You heard about Red Ruthven's notice, about the best part of the gang leaving?"

"Yes. It would have been better if those down-stairs, had 'a' went, too, and me in the bargain."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, just before I came here, I took a

skirmish about the camp to see what I could learn. I found that the goody-goody folks, who work in the mine, aire glad thet Red Ruthven's paper hes skeered out so many of the gang, and they're talkin' o' organizin' to-morrow and drivin' the rest of us off the claim!"

"Bah! let 'em organize!" Black Mag said, with a chuckle. "You and I will be gone before then if nothing interferes!"

"But, something will interfere!"

"Bah! what?"

"Well, it may make et plainer ter ye when I tell ye thet there's a squad o' Uncle Sam's troops strung across each outlet of the gulch, and you well know there is no escape from here up the mountain sides!"

This announcement caused Black Mag to utter something suspiciously like an oath.

"You mean to tell me this in earnest?" she demanded, half-fiercely.

"I do, you bet! Su'thin' put et inter my head ter take a look in them directions, an' I nearly stumbled on two different parties o' soldiers. Couldn't find out how many thar war o' 'em, an' had ter git, fer fear they would capture me!"

"What has brought them here?—who has brought them here?" Mag asked, thoughtfully. "To be sure, the camp has long borne a hard reputation, but I never expected troops would be brought here."

"I think I've an idea!" McTiger said, rubbing his sore nose gently. "You remember the young cuss Philo Fly of Phenix?"

"Yes. I set him down for a spy or a detective!"

"I reckon ev'ry one did. Waal, 'twixt you an' me, I don't believe the chap were burnt up at all, an' I believe he war the cause o' these soldiers comin' here. He swore he'd make et red hot for this camp, an' et looks like he war goin' to do it."

"What makes you think he didn't perish in the fire?"

"'Cause the bones of only one carcass were found. There war two in the cabin—one got erway. The guard hain't showed up since, so et stan's to reason he were burned. The feller who got away must have been Phil Fly. Besides all that, ef I know the diff'rence 'twixt whisky and water, Philo Fly were in town to-day!"

"Did you see him?"

"No, but I felt him!"

"Ah! the man who came to purchase the mine?"

"The same!"

"If Philo Fly, he must have been in disguise."

"Of course."

"This is bad!" Mag said, grimly. "When you come to mention it, I've a notion your idea is correct. What's to be done?"

"Give it up. What kin be done? We're hemmed as tight as ef the work war done by a sowin'-masheen."

"Do you think Buck Brennan knows about the soldiers?"

"Nix! I allow no one else has seen 'em but me."

"They won't make an attack to-night!" Mag said, decidedly.

"Why not?"

"Because it's too dark. They wouldn't know whom they were killing or capturing."

"Guess you're right. They'll make er move on us in ther mornin' and demand surrender!"

"But, we must not be here!" Black Mag said, examining her watch. "It is nearly time for me to go and meet Beatrice. You may go and make another careful reconnoissance. Keep a watch on Brennan's house, and see that he does not leave it unknown to you. If he does leave it, you follow him, and kill him—do you hear? Then, the coast will be clear for the fortune in the safe!"

McTiger nodded assent, but looked grim.

"Sposin' I should get killed first?" he suggested rather gloomily—"what then?"

"Oh! that will be of small account. I will avenge you. But there's no danger of your getting hurt, if you use your knife properly. Remember, no pop-guns to-night."

"Are you going to kill Beatrice?" McTiger asked, not seeming entirely pleased with the prospectus.

"Oh! I am just going to talk with her," was the steely reply, whereupon Black Mag arose and left the room.

McTiger sat a while, looking toward the floor with one eye partly closed, as if he were in a deep study over some matter.

"I dunno about this business o' killin'," he muttered, directly. "O' course, ter be in fash-

ion, I've allowed thet I hed filled a dozen cemeteries or so, but I don't remember as I ever killed anything much bigger than a cat. Now, before we go to wadin' knee-deep into gore, jes' let's size up this thing. Fightin' is all right. A feller relishes that like er calf does butter-milk, onless he gets punched, like I did to-day; then it's soon over, an' he's alive."

"But this killin', dead—I don't know about that. Don't think I'd like to be er corpus. 'Pears like they wanted to get near a fire. Reckon some o' 'em does et too near one, the way they're singin' 'em out East."

"No, by thunder! I don't believe I hanker after the job, at all. If Black Mag wants him killed, let her do the job herself. I don't mind sharin' the swag with her, but I'll be teetotally cussed ef I want any murder on my dainty dukes, says Butcher McTiger!"

"That's right, Butch, old boy! I admire your good principles—I do, by gum!"

And with the words, McTiger received a slap on the shoulder that caused him to fairly bound from his chair.

As soon as he could regain his scattered senses, he made the startling discovery that he was in the presence of two persons, both of whom grasped cocked revolvers.

The one Butch had no difficulty in recognizing as Philo Fly, of Phenix.

The other was a slight, boyish figure, whom the reader will probably recognize as Jim.

"How are you, Butch?" Phil said, with a laugh. "You seem to be looking well, all except that horn of yours. Must have run against some one's fist, didn't you? Sit still now, and don't give the slightest toot of your bugle, or I shall be under the necessity of putting out the light of your candle. If you behave yourself and do as I direct, your personal safety will be all correct."

"What d'ye want?" McTiger growled, remaining seated, and looking decidedly sullen, while he kept a weather eye on the weapons of the pair.

"We want you to know we are here on business, and we mean business!" Phil replied. "We just heard you telling Black Mag about the troops. Do you know who brought the troops?"

"You, I suppose."

"Right in one sense, wrong in another. I hunted down one Ezra Athol, for a bank-robbery and murder in San Diego. I found him here, under the name of Buck Brennan. I found out much more also. I sent word to the California authorities, and a requisition was applied for to take Athol back into the State. I gave warning of the desperate character of this camp, and when the United States marshal brought the requisition to-day, he came backed with sufficient troops to prevent any one escaping from this camp. Under my directions, he to-night stationed his men as you found them, and escape is impossible, unless one has wings to fly. How are you fixed for wings, Butch?"

"Mine hain't sprouted yet," was the grim reply.

"I thought not. Now, Butch, you see how the case lies—you're a hard crowd, and your chances look rather slim. But for what you said, a bit ago, about not wanting to commit murder, you would be the very first man I should arrest. It is the proposition of myself and the marshal to arrest you all, quietly, and avoid as little bloodshed as possible. See?"

"Dunno what ye want ter arrest me fer!" Butch growled. "I haven't done anything."

"Oh! we all know that. You're an angel, shorn of its wings! Now, look here, Butch; you know all the secrets of this shebang, don't you?"

"I know a few, mebbe."

"Of course you do. You're a pretty tough customer, the way you look at it; but for all that, you wouldn't like to experience having a rope shirred about your gullet would you?"

"Waal, I should presume not."

"So I thought. It isn't the most pleasant thing imaginable. Now, since hearing you own up to yourself that you wouldn't like to do murder, I see there is some little good in you, and if you will do as I direct, I'll see that you get clear of everything, and have your liberty!"

"Then, I'm ver ha'rp'in!" Butch cried, enthusiastically. "Yer kin bet yer bottom dollar I won't go back on sech a chance as that, nohow! What d'ye want o' me?"

"A good deal; but if you give us a fair illustration of faithfulness, you'll have no cause to regret it. In the first place, there's a cellar under this shebang!"

"Yes."

"What's in it?"
 "A lot of boxes and barrels."
 "Nothing else?"
 "No."
 "No lying now, or your jig's up!"
 "I'm tellin' ye the truth."
 "Then, where's the counterfeiting done?"
 "In a sub-cellar, under the main one."
 "Ah! Is it a large place?"
 "Sorter. About as big as t'other 'un."
 "Who does the counterfeiting?"
 "Thar's six on 'em. You've heerd 'bout men a-comin' here, what never showed up again?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, they work the presses."
 "I think I see. They are held prisoners, and forced to do this work."
 "You've hit it!"
 "Why were not the gang given this work?"
 "They were better to hang around up-stairs, and fight ef needed. Besides, ef they went below, they'd want pay!" and McGtiger grinned, knowingly.
 "I see!" Phil said, thoughtfully; "these prisoners are forced to work without pay."
 "'Cept bread an' water. Ef they behave well, an' ain't lazy, they get meat sometimes."
 "Bartley Brewster down there?"
 "Yes."
 "At work?"
 "Not yet. He war goin' ter be set to work to-morrow. He's jest got well."
 "Is Alma Athol down there?"
 "I don't know who you mean!"
 "Look out! no lying!"
 "'Pon honor, I never heard of sech a person."
 "Buck Brennan, otherwise Ezra Athol, has a daughter imprisoned somewhere about this camp. You know where she is?"
 A light of comprehension broke over McGtiger's brutal face.
 "Oh! you mean his niece. She's crazy, an' locked up in another part of the sub-cellar than the counterfeiting part."
 "Crazy, you say?"
 "The boss sez so."
 "Does she ever mention her name?"
 "Never heard her. I've been her keeper, too, for some time."
 "Does she ever talk?"
 "Not much. About the only thing she sez is fer ter be let out, so she can find her lover, Florian Flood."
 "Ah! It is indeed poor Alma Athol!" Philo said, turning to Jim. Then to Butch he continued:
 "This cellar is reached by the trap in the main room, down stairs?"
 "That's one way, yes—"
 "There is another way?"
 "Yes."
 "Besides the counterfeitters in the den who else is there?"
 "Only one—Jake Cub, the big nigger. He watches over the men with a pair o' six-shooters, to see thet they do their work right an' don't mutinize."
 "Another thing I'd nearly forgotten," added Philo, "who does the engraving of the plates?"
 "Beatrice!"
 "Correct—at least, so I inferred. Now, Butch, there is work ahead. We must get into that underground den and liberate those prisoners."
 Butch looked bland.
 "Dunno about that," he declared. "Of course et's all right an' kereck about liberatin' the prisoners, but, 'twixt you an' me, I ain't pertickler 'bout facin' Jake Cub's revolvers. He's allus on the watch, w' his pop-guns ready for use, an' I tell yer that durned nigger can shute ther pimple off'n a man's nose!"
 "Can't help that!" Philo assured. "It's positively necessary to free the prisoners at once!"
 Butch was silent a moment.
 "I've an idea," he said, "if we could only make it work. At ten o'clock each night I take the nigger down a bottle of bug-juice. Ef we only had something to put in it—"
 "I'm your man!" Dick announced, promptly.
 "Here is a small vial of morphia solution. Pour half the quantity into the whisky and Cub will go to sleep pretty lively. It is near ten o'clock now and so you had better go. When you have executed your errand return to the next room from this."
 "Good! I'll fix the nagur!" McGtiger assured, as he took the vial and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAD WOMAN'S REVENGE.

WHEN Black Mag went down-stairs, she was intensely excited, but no one would have known

it by her demeanor, for her face was not to be seen.

She went behind the bar, and poured out a glass of whisky, and drank it down with as little hesitation as though it had been water.

She then paced up and down the room for a few moments, without speaking to any one; then, suddenly opened the door, and passed out into the darkness of the night.

Those gathered within the Roaring Bull looked thunder-struck, for this was the first time Black Mag had been known to leave the hotel, since she had entered its doors!

Once outside, and a few yards from the hotel, in its rear Mag paused.

The night was intensely dark, there being no moon, and the sky being covered with inky clouds.

There was no lightning, no thunder, still the clouds threatened to send down a flood of rain, at any moment.

When she paused, Mag pressed her hands to her forehead, for a moment, as if her head ached, or else she was trying to think of something.

Then, she grated her teeth together, and glided away toward the Brennan house.

As she drew near it, she perceived that a light was burning in the front room, or parlor, but the curtain was pulled closely down, so that she could not look in.

This seemed a disappointment to her.

She pressed close to the window, and listened. Inside she could hear footsteps.

Some one was pacing regularly to and fro—no doubt Buck Brennan.

This appeared to satisfy the woman, for she once more glided away, and did not pause until she reached a large gray boulder, which arose, abruptly, out of the ground, to the height of some ten or twelve feet.

Here she came to a halt, and looked sharply around her, but the darkness was so intense she could scarcely see a foot before her face.

"Beatrice!" she called.

No answer.

"Can it be that, besides proving herself faithless, she is too much of a coward to face me?" Black Mag hissed.

A soft footstep sounded near, and in a moment more Beatrice, attired in a flowing wrapper, stood before the mysterious keeper of the Roaring Bull Hotel.

"Well, you have come, eh?" Mag said, rather sharply.

"Yes. I could not get away, on account of Lord Dudley. What in the world is the matter, Mag?"

"Matter enough," was the terse reply. "Girl, or rather woman—for you are far enough past girlhood's days—when did you first know me?" Beatrice looked surprised.

"When did I first know you?"

"Exactly!"

"Why it was some little time after you came to Claim 10, wasn't it?"

"Precisely. Who was it that first sought acquaintanceship?"

"Why, I—I believe it was I!" Beatrice replied, beginning to grow a little nervous under the steady gaze of those glittering eyes.

"You came to me?"

"Yes."

"What did you propose?"

"Why, I—I—"

"I'll tell you!" Mag interrupted fiercely.

"You said you were Buck Brennan's wife, but hated him, and proposed to me that we connive together, and as soon as we could raise a large sum of money, we would leave for foreign parts together, taking with us all the valuables we could lay our hands on, including Buck Brennan's money."

"You engraved a special plate, and I personally worked off and circulated the paper, and gave you the good money to keep, as I trusted you. Now then, is not all this true?"

"Well, yes, I believe so."

"And what is my reward? After all I have done for both you and Brennan—I've been your tool, your instrument, and you might say, your slave—how am I to be used?"

"Why, Maggie, I don't understand you. Are we not treating you all right?"

"No, you are not!" Mag cried, with sudden fire. "You think I am a fool, Barbara Lonsvale, but I am not!"

"Barbara Lonsvale!" gasped Beatrice, reeling back.

"Yes, Barbara Lonsvale! I know you, and your true name. I also know that brute you are, I suppose, married to—Buck Brennan, he is called here, but whose real name is Ezra Athol, villain, defaulter, bank-robber, and murderer—"

a wretch even guilty of keeping his own child locked up in a dungeon.

"Oh! I know him well!"

"And the greatest surprise I've had, was in you, who promised constancy to me. Ha! you can't trust any one, nowadays."

"So you and Buck had a nice little plan to pocket all the money you could get hold of, eh, and fold your tents, Arab-like, and steal silently away, leaving us to the mercy of the officers of the law, who you suspected would soon pull the place!"

"That is false. It's a lie! Beatrice cried, hotly. "We have had no such intentions!"

"Bah! it is you who lie!" Mag cried, fiercely.

"Your whole scheme has been unfolded to me by one who overheard it. So there's no use of your trying to lie out of it. You had a conspiracy to skip out, and leave us in the lurch, but you will get fooled. The town is surrounded on the two sides, by soldiers, who have come for Ezra Athol. But, they shall not have him, nor you either! I intend to settle with you first. I am going to kill you, Beatrice, for your intended treachery."

"Do not start, nor attempt to escape, for by so doing you will only shorten your moments on earth. Before I kill you, see if you know me?"

She tore the veil from her face, and stepped close to the woman she intended to kill.

"Look!" she cried—"do you know me?"

Beatrice stared into her face, a moment, then gaspingly ejaculated:

"Maude!"

"Yes, Maude!" was the reply—"Maude, your sister—Maude, whom Ezra Athol attempted to kill on the Kansas plains, in a blinding snow-storm, years ago—Maude, the avenger!"

"Die, beautiful traitress, die, by the hand of her whose rights you usurped!"

Something bright flashed through the air; then Barbara Lonsvale threw up her hands, and fell backward upon the ground, with a dull thud.

She never uttered a sound, never even moved after she fell.

"She's dead, and I am partly avenged!" Black Mag hissed, bending over her victim. "It's better so. She will never commit any more sin, now."

A heavy hand was laid upon her arm, as she straightened up, and Red Ruthven stood before her!

She knew him at a glance—she had seen him before.

"What do you want?" she demanded, fiercely, but not trying to break from his grasp, because she knew she could not.

"So you are Maude, eh?" he demanded, grimly.

"Yes, I am Maude. Who are you?"

"Lucas Lee!" he replied, "Lucas Lee, the seaman, of other days—Lucas Lee, once your husband, before you forsook his home, in his absence, to live with the moneyed rascal, Ezra Athol. Do you know me?"

"I remember you!" she gritted. "Release my arm!"

"Never!" he replied.

"Then, take the consequences of your folly!"

Her knife once more flashed through the air, and entered his breast.

With a groan, he released his hold upon her arm and fell.

Then, with a wild cry, she turned and fled away through the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END.

And, now, we come to the last scene of our drama.

The locale is the great bar-room of the Roaring Bull Hotel.

Outside, the night has grown wild.

The wind shrieks around the eaves, and rain dashes against the window-panes.

Still above the warring of the storm, the regular tramp! tramp! tramp of a guard of soldiers can be heard.

Within, the scene was a peculiar one.

At one side of the room a number had been strung along, and upon the other of manacled prisoners were seated. A soldier with drawn sword paced to and fro in front of them.

"These men were the remnant of Black Mag's gang, who had remained behind, including a burly negro, and the barkeeper."

Their looks proved that they were feeling anything but comfortable.

And no wonder!

Across the room, directly opposite them, was another bench, upon which were seated six men—pale, thin and emaciated human beings, with straggling beards and greasy garments.

They certainly looked as if they had passed through a great deal of hardship.

These men were not manacled.

Near them stood a man in uniform, who wore the insignia of captain.

Next to him, and conversing with him, was seated a strongly-built man, of honest, but decisive countenance.

Upon a bench, in the middle of the room, a human figure was stretched out, but it was covered up with a sheet.

Blood dripping down upon the floor, however, told a significant tale of its own.

But a few feet further on, a man, partly bolstered up, lay upon a bed of blankets on the floor.

His face deathly pale, and his eyes closed, but he was not dead, for his breath came and went in quick gasps.

This man was Red Ruthven!

There was no blood visible about his person.

Standing near the bar, and looking decidedly nervous, was Lord Derby Dudley.

That comprised the list of those present.

Where were Philo Fly of Phenix and Jim?

We will leave that for subsequent events to show.

The captain and the man next to him were talking, the former speaking:

"Maybe you give the chap more credit, sir, than he deserves!"

"Not a bit of it, I assure you. He's as sharp as you find 'em, and you'll see him waltz the prisoner in here before you know it. Why, sir, he is already a favorite with California authorities, although he has never been across the line, I think."

"What is his real name, did you say?"

"Richard Bristol. His mother was killed by a villainous uncle, and then, assuming the name of Deadwood Dick Jr.—you know the original Deadwood Dick was noted for great daring—our young detective hunted down his mother's murderer and killed him. Since then he has proved himself an apt detective, and under different aliases, has worked out some fine cases."

"Just so. Your faith in the fellow, marshal, may be the greatest, but in a case like this, I should say it would not be policy to make any mistakes. I am of the opinion I had better send half a dozen of my boys, to make the arrest."

"Nothing of the sort, sir. Don't fret yourself. It is me who is to stand the blame if Ezra Athol escapes. My only fear is that the woman they call Black Mag will escape."

"I don't see how she can, unless she is a witch. My men are strung solidly across the gulch, at either outlet of the camp. To get past them undetected, would be something impossible."

"I see you have about the same confidence in your men that I have in Philo Fly," the United States Marshal laughed, good naturedly.

At this juncture, one of the drenched soldiers, who were on guard duty, entered the hotel, and approached the captain.

"There's a stranger outside, sir," he said, "who has just arrived on horseback, and says he wants to get shelter here, until the storm is over!"

The captain and marshal exchanged glances.

"I guess it's all right," the latter responded. "Send him in. One man can't do any harm here."

The soldier touched his cap and took his departure, and a moment later, the stranger was admitted.

He was roughly clad—evidently a miner—and wore a long tangled beard that almost entirely covered his face, and a shaggy mass of hair.

Glancing about the room, and by expression of countenance evincing some surprise at the peculiarity of the scene into which he had been introduced, he approached the marshal and captain.

"Looks kinder like ther' was su'thin' wrong, 'bout," he observed, with a grin.

"There is," the marshal replied. "This is a hard sort of town, and we concluded to give you time to try and take some of the life out of it. Stranger here?"

"My name is Hooker, an' I war on my first wife, when I got cotched in the storm, 'bout a year ago."

"I'd better pull in here until it stopped raining. Ther' sojers wasn't goin' ter let me thru, 'til I told 'em who I was, an' where I war goin'."

"Don't suppose thar's any chance to get anything to drink, hyer, is ther'?"

"There's the bar; help yourself to such as you find there," replied the marshal.

Mr. Hooker did not wait for the second invitation, but proceeded to make himself at home behind the bar, and was noticed to take several bumpers, one after another.

It was not long after, when the door opened, and three persons entered.

They were Philo Fly, of Phenix, Jim, the Girl Miner, and Buck Brennan!

Brennan was a prisoner, between the two.

His hands were bound behind his back; his head uncovered, and hair matted with blood.

He was at once marched forward into the presence of the captain and marshal.

His features wore a defiant, ugly expression, and his eyes gleamed savagely.

He was still far from being a conquered man in spirit.

"Oh! we got 'em!" Philo announced, enthusiastically. "He fought like a tiger, but wasn't no match for both of us. He an' I was huggin', to see which could hug the hardest, when Jim, here, hit him a couple o' belts over the head with a poker, and he drapped. Then we got him! After he found his dukes were confined, he came right along, as meek as a lamb."

"Ezra Athol!" said the marshal, rising, and gravely confronting the prisoner; "I have a warrant for your arrest for the murder of Samuel Styles, and also a requisition to take you into California, where your trial will take place!"

"To the devil with you and your warrant!" was the gruff response. "With my hands free, I'd murder the whole of you!"

"Fetch that arm-chair!" ordered Philo. "We'll bind his feet, and then bind him in the chair. Then, he will be safe."

This was done.

While Philo and Jim were near where Ruthven lay, the stranger, Hooker, approached the prisoner, and gazed at him, curiously.

"Why, Athol is that you?" he demanded.

"It's me," was the grim reply. "Who are you?"

"I am Maude," was the quick reply—"Maude whom you seduced from her happy home—Maude whom you lured West, and tried to murder—Maude who swore vengeance—and here it is!"

Before any one could prevent her, the disguised murderess drew a dagger from behind her, and bending forward, stabbed Ezra Athol once, twice, thrice in the breast.

She then tried to stab herself, but was prevented by Philo, who caught her arm, and others coming to his assistance, she was overpowered, and bound hand and foot.

Her screams seemed to arouse Red Ruthven from the lethargy of death into which he was gradually sinking.

He sat bolt upright, and glared wildly about him.

"That was her voice," he cried in a firm, clear tone. "I would know it among a hundred. Where is she; where is she?"

"What is it, Ruthven?" Philo demanded, approaching him.

"Was it—was it Mag—Maude?—did she kill that scoundrel, Athol?"

"She did! But, she is now a prisoner. Do you want to see her?"

"Yes! Yes! Be quick about it!"

The false beard and wig were removed, and then Maude Lonsvale was half dragged before the dying road-agent.

There were tears in her eyes, as she gazed at him, but she managed to control her emotions.

"She killed me!" Ruthven said, bracing up with an effort. "I was a seaman. I picked her up out of the streets of New York, and married her—so part of Lord Dudley's story is incorrect. I thought I had an angel. She was not my first wife. My first wife gave me a child. I married this woman, went to sea, leaving my child with her. When I returned, my home was vacant, my wife and child gone. Little by little I found out that she had lived with a rich scoundrel named Athol, and had gone West with him, taking my Lena with her."

"I took the trail, and at last, after many long years of search, weaved out the web that located them here, but, unknown to one another. They became parted in a snow-storm in Kansas, where it appears Athol tried to murder her."

"Take her away. She has done enough and her punishment will be sufficient, even if you give her her freedom!"

Maude Lonsvale was accordingly removed to another part of the room, and put under guard. Suddenly Ruthven sat up again.

"Phil! Phil!" he fairly screamed.

Phil hastened to his side.

"What is it, Ruthven?" he asked.

"Where is she? where is she?"

"Your wife?"

"No! no! no! no! Jim!"

Jim hurried forward and knelt by the dying man's side. He caught both her hand and Phil's in his own, and said:

"So young, and so strong, and I who have hitherto been so strong, am dying. Phil?"

"Well, Ruthven?"

"Do you know who this child is? No, you do not. Even she does not know. Phil, she is my child—my little Lena Lee, whom I lost so many years ago."

Here the dying man broke down, and wept bitterly, and so did Philo and Lena.

And it is doubtful if among those present, whose souls were not calloused with sin, there was a dry eye.

"Phil," Ruthven went on directly, "she is my child—and now, all alone in the world, at an age when she should most be protected, for I am dying. I saw you with her to-day; I drew you into the thicket, and demanded to know if you meant her harm. You looked me squarely in the eye, and said you did not. I believed you, and put all confidence in you."

"She will be all alone now. Will you take her, my noble lad, and see that the world uses her right?"

"Ruthven, believe me, I will!"

"Thank God! Kiss me, my child, and then—good-by!"

With tears streaming down her face, Lena kissed him; then he sunk back, with closed eyes, and an expression of peaceful contentment stole over his face.

Every head in the room, seemingly by one holy impulse, became bowed.

The marshal was the first to look up. The spirit of Red Ruthven had gone forever from this mortal realm.

Phil sat beside the corpse, supporting the insensible form of the road-agent's daughter.

Poor Jim!

The last act of the tragedy was over.

Why give in detail the unimportant events that followed.

A few words will suffice.

The bodies of Ruthven, Ezra Athol, and Beatrice, were buried on Claim 10, now the property of William McCombes.

Of course, Florian Flood and Alma Athol, who played an unimportant part in our narrative were rescued; but by Phil's orders, were not liberated until that last scene was closed, and the interments had taken place.

They were then reunited, and are now married.

The remnant of the "gang," together with Maude Lonsvale, were sent to prison; Maude, however, committed suicide before her trial came off.

Lord Derby Dudley went back to England, a wiser man, though no loser—for a check he had given to Beatrice was recovered—and the Lonsvale estate will go to the Queen.

THE END.

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